WESTERN YARNS

10¢

TEN COMPLETE GUN-SWIFT STORIES—10¢

JANUARY

SHOWDOWN FOR A GUN-GHOST

brand new novel of
law-bringers of th
by JOHN A.

also
S. OM
ZAC
ONG

A RUITS FOR BOOT-HILL

action-packed novel by
Cliff Campbell

I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *in Your Spare Time For A* GOOD RADIO JOB

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 1914

The man who has directed the home-study training of more men for the Radio Industry, than any other man in America.

Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many $200 to $500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, and pay up to $6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—$200 to $500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8NA2
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

HERE'S PROOF THAT MY TRAINING PAYS

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

"When I completed 20 lessons I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined station WMPC, where I am now Chief Operator."—HOLLIS F. HAYES, 85 Madison St., Lapeer, Mich.

Over $1,000 Before Graduating

"Before completing half the N.R.I. Course I was servicing sets, and I made $1,000 to $1,200 before graduating. I am doing Radio service work for myself now."—ASHLEY G. ALDRIDGE, 1228 Shepherd St. Petersburg, Va.

$200 to $300 a Month in Own Business

"For the last 18 months I have been in business for myself, making between $200 and $300 a month. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field."—ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 224 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.

THIS FREE BOOK HAS HELPED HUNDREDS OF MEN MAKE MORE MONEY

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8NA2
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

WESTERN YARNS

10 Complete Action Stories 10c

Vol. I, No. 5 *Jan., 1939, Issue*

CONTENTS

TWO SMASHING NOVELS

(1) **SHOWDOWN FOR A GUN-GHOST**.....John A. Saxon 12
A trigger-weak star toter's boot-hill plea sent Sid Doane, ace of the Border Law-bringers, roaring back to the town that had condemned him, to face a blazing purgatory of flaming lead with guns that were only ghosts!

(2) **RECRUITS FOR BOOT-HILL**.....Cliff Campbell 27
Could Red Regan, that free-booting lawman of the frontier follow his heritage of gunsmoke and fight for rangeland peace, when it meant he must destine for boot-hill his own best friend?

TWO ACTION-PACKED NOVELETS

(3) **THE BLACK LINE OF DEATH**.....Guy Arnold 70
Bill Brown gambled his life with a speeding wall of roaring water . . . . and with the thwarted rage of a kill-crazy gun-boss!

(4) **HELL'S HOT SPREAD**.....Wilcey Earle 77
Ill gotten wealth could never bring back to life the friend Lew Travois loved, nor save Lew from a bleak and forbidding future on the owl-hoot trail!

SIX DRAMATIC SHORT STORIES

(5) **BUZZARDS DON'T USE BULLETS**.....James Rourke 63
Their one last gasp of hope was the trigger-magic of Speck Brown . . . . and a prayer!

(6) **THE DEVIL'S DRIVER**.....Zachary Strong 87
He must take the stage coach through . . . and he could either succeed, or die!

(7) **THE SPEEDY JACK RABBIT**.....S. Omar Barker 92
Facts about the prairies' speed champion.

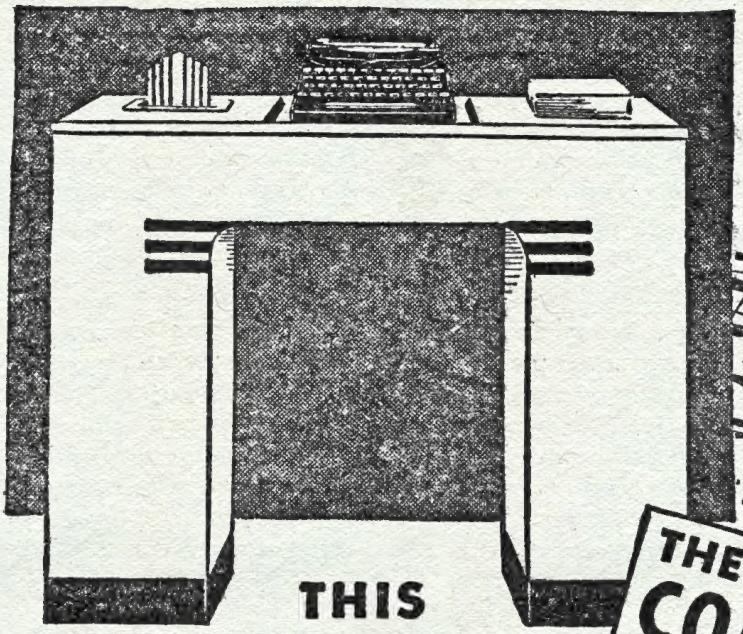
(8) **A DISAPPEARING RIVER**..... 93
A true story of the West.

(9) **THE DEATH DEALER'S MATE**.....Ed Earl Repp 94
She gave her love to the west's worst outlaw, Harry Tracy, the Oregon Death Dealer!

(10) **SIGNED ON AS A KILLER**.....Gratton Boone 98
The sheriff and the ace gun-slick of that killer's crew met in the middle of the street . . . and boot-hill would take the slowest!

FOR THE BEST IN POPULAR FICTION READ A DOUBLE ACTION MAGAZINE. Double Action Western, Real Western, Double Action Gang, Blue Ribbon Western, Smashing Western, Western Action Complete Northwest, Action Packed Western, Sports Winners, Sports Fiction, Adventure Yarns, Ten Story Gang, Super Sports, Intimate Confessions, Personal Confessions, Blue Ribbon Sports, Western Yarns, Ten Story Sports, Cowboy Romances, Western Love Story Magazine, Romantic Love Secrets, Intimate Romances, Famous Western, Detective Yarns Air Action, Undercover Detective and Complete Cowboy Magazine.

WESTERN YARNS, published bimonthly by Columbia Publication, Inc., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 60 Hudson Street, New York, N. Y. Copyright, 1938, by Columbia Publications, Inc. Entered as second-class matter November 16, 1937, at the post office at Holyoke, Mass., under the act of March 3, 1879. Yearly subscription, 60c; single copy, 10c. For advertising rates, write Double Action Group, 60 Hudson Street, New York, N. Y. Manuscripts are to be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes, and are to be submitted at the author's risk.



ACT NOW!

ON THIS BARGAIN OFFER.

THIS BEAUTIFUL DESK FOR ONLY $1.00

WITH ANY

REMINGTON PORTABLE TYPEWRITER

A beautiful desk in a neutral blue-green fits into the decorations of any home—trimmed in black and silver—made of sturdy fibre board—now available for only one dollar ($1.00) to purchasers of a Remington Noiseless Portable Typewriter. The desk is so light that it can be moved anywhere without trouble. It will hold six hundred (600) pounds. This combination gives you a miniature office at home. Mail the coupon today.

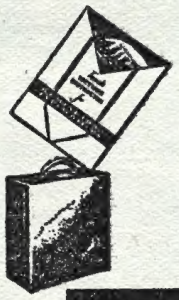
THE COMBINATION FOR AS LITTLE AS 10c A DAY

How easy it is to pay for this combination. Just imagine! Terms as low as 10c a day to get this combination at once: You will never miss 10c a day. Become immediately the possessor of this amazing combination. You assume no obligations by sending the coupon.

THESE EXTRAS FOR YOU

LEARN TYPING FREE

To help you even further, you get free with this special offer a 19-page booklet, prepared by experts, to teach you quickly how to typewrite by the touch method. When you buy a Noiseless you get this free Remington Rand gift that increases the pleasure of using your Remington Noiseless Portable. Remember, the touch typing book is sent free while this offer holds.



SPECIAL CARRYING CASE

The Remington Noiseless Portable is light in weight, easily carried about. With this offer Remington supplies a sturdy, beautiful carrying case which rivals the most attractive luggage you can buy.

SPECIFICATIONS

ALL ESSENTIAL FEATURES of large standard office machines appear in the Noiseless Portable—standard 4-row keyboard; back spacer; margin stops and margin release; double shift key; two color ribbon and automatic reverse; variable line spacer; paper fingers; makes as many as seven carbons; takes paper 9.5" wide; writes lines 8.2" wide, black key cards and white letters, rubber cushioned feet.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

The Remington Noiseless Portable Typewriter is sold on a trial basis with a money back guarantee. If, after ten days trial, you do not wish to keep the typewriter, we will take it back, paying all shipping charges. You take no risk.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 164-1
465 Washington St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Tell me, without obligation, how to get a Free Trial of a new Remington Noiseless Portable, including Carrying Case and Free Typing Course for as little as 10c a day. Send Catalogue.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

$1 BRINGS YOUR CHOICE of these Gifts

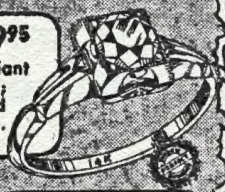
BUY NOW— get this SALAD SET FREE

10 MONTHS TO PAY
10 DAYS FREE TRIAL
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

FREE

This $2.95 7-Piece SILVERPLATE SALAD SET if you send $1 with order, saving us C.O.D. charges. Money back if not satisfied.

$52.50 A351—Sworn perfect Diamond; 2 other diamonds. 14K yellow gold. Affidavit with purchase. $5.15 a month



A147—Sworn perfect Diamond Feature. Brilliant perfect diamond; 14K yellow gold mounting. $50 value. $2.98 a month — **$29.95**

A80—Bridal Pair—Engagement-Wedding Ring to match. 14K yellow gold. 5 diamonds in each. $3.25 a month — **$33.50**

435—Massive 14K yellow gold man's initial ring. Diamond and initials on black onyx. $1.98 a month — **$19.95**

$39.75 R136 — Bulova's newest feature — the Dolly Madison. Tiny watch with 21 jewel movement. Case in charm and color of natural gold. Complete in gift box. $3.88 a month

P250—Ladies' tiny watch, 2 diamonds in newest style case—charm and color of natural gold jewels. $1.70 a month — **$17.95**

P514—Small size 20 diamond watch—14K white gold—17 jewels. Worth $65. $4.65 a month — **$47.50**

K57—Man's watch—newest style, roman numerals on non-tarnishable chrome case—jewels. $1.40 a month — **$14.95**

613—Benrus 17 jewel Signet Watch with initials in 10K yellow plated gold plate case. Mention initials. $2.38 a month — **$24.75**

615—Ladies' Benrus Signet Watch. Small size. 10K yellow rolled gold plate case. Bracelet to match. 7 jewels. $2.38 a month — **$24.75**

R129—Lady Bulova—a 17 jewel feature in charm and color of natural gold. $2.88 a month — **$29.75**

Bring Happiness this Christmas with a gift of jewelry. It's simple—here's how you do it. Put a dollar bill in an envelope with your name, address and the number of article wanted. Tell us your age (must be over 20) occupation, employer and a few simple facts about yourself. Information held strictly confidential—no direct inquiries made. Upon arrival of your order, we will open a 10 month Charge Account for you and send selection for approval and your free gift . . . this $2.95 7 pc. Silverplate SALAD SET. If not satisfied, return merchandise and your dollar will be refunded immediately. If satisfied, pay the balance in 10 small monthly payments. Send Coupon today.

W103 — 10K yellow gold engraved Cross with Chain. Size illustrated. $1 a month — **$10.95**

M211 — Bulova Minute Man — 17 jewel curved watch in charm and color of natural gold. $3.28 a month — **$33.75**

SEND COUPON WITH $1

L. W. SWEET

FREE TO ADULTS A Postcard brings our 52 page catalog. Send for it today.

MAIL ORDER DIVISION OF FINLAY STRAUS

Dept. 999-A

1670 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

L. W. SWEET.
Dept. 999-A 1670 Broadway, New York City

Gentlemen: Enclosed find $1 — send for approval and free trial No. with SALAD SET Free. If not satisfied, I will return articles and you will refund my dollar.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

Send brief note with coupon giving age, occupation, employer and a few facts about yourself.

Our FREE Offer expires Jan. 30, 1939.

IMAGINE THEIR JOY

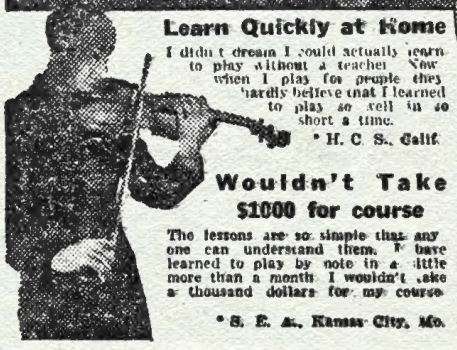
WHEN THEY FOUND THEY COULD PLAY

This easy as A.B.C. way!

Plays on Radio

I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course.

* W. H. S., Alabama.



Learn Quickly at Home

I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time.

* H. C. S., Calif.

Wouldn't Take $1000 for course

The lessons are so simple that any one can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course.

* S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

Surprised Friends

I want to say that my friends are greatly surprised at the different pieces I can already play. I am very happy to have chosen your method of learning.

* B. F., Bronx, N. Y.

Best Method by Far

Enclosed is my last examination sheet for my course in Tenor Banjo. This completes my course. I have taken lessons before under teachers, but my instructions with you were by far the best.

* A. O., Minn.

What Instrument Would You Like To Play?

JUST name your instrument and we'll show you how you can learn to play it—quickly, easily, in spare time at home. Never mind if you don't know one note of music from another—don't worry about 'special talent.' And forget all you've ever heard about music's being hard to learn.

The truth of the matter is that *thousands now play who never thought they could!* Yes, men and women everywhere have discovered this amazingly easy way to learn music at home. Now they are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of playing the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorite instruments. Some of them are playing in orchestras and over the radio; others are teaching music, making money in spare or full time. And thousands are having the time of their lives playing for their own enjoyment and the entertainment of their friends.

It all came about when they wrote to the U. S. School of music for the Free Booklet and Demonstration Lesson that show you how EASY it is to learn music at home this modern way. No tedious study and practice, no tiresome exercises. You learn to play *by playing*—start right in almost at once with the melody of a simple tune! It takes only a few minutes a day and the cost is trifling; you save the expense of a private teacher. Does it sound too good to be true? Mail the coupon and get the FREE PROOF! U. S. School of Music, 1231 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. C., N. Y.

(Our forty-first year—Est. 1898.)

SEND FOR FREE DEMONSTRATION LESSON AND BOOKLET

● You'll open your eyes when you find how quickly and easily you can learn to play your favorite instrument. Don't doubt; don't hesitate. Send for the fascinating illustrated booklet that answers all your questions; let the free demonstration lesson show you how this method actually works. There's no cost, no obligation. Just mail the coupon, NOW (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit). *Actual pupil's names on request. Pictures by professional models.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
1231 Brunswick Bldg., New York City, N. Y.

Without cost or obligation to me, please send me your free illustrated booklet and demonstration lesson. I am interested in the instrument checked below:

Piano	Banjo	Trombone
Violin	Mandolin	Flute
Guitar	Ukulele	Piccolo
Piano Accordion	Cornet	Organ
Plain Accordion	Trumpet	Drums and Traps
Saxophone	Harp	Harmony and Composition
Cello	Clarinet	Voice Culture
Hawaiian Guitar		

Name..... Have You This Instru?.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

BOYS! ● GIRLS!
BIKE GIVEN

BALLOON TIRES Headlight—Horn—Coaster Brake — Chromium plated parts—What a Bike! — Or big cash commission. Yours for Simply GIVING AWAY FREE big colored pictures with well known WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for burns, chap, sores, etc., easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remitting per premium plan book. Choice of many other premiums. 43rd season. WRITE TODAY for order of White Cloverine Salve and pictures sent, postage paid.

WILSON CHEM. CO., Inc. Dept. DA-877. TYRONE, PA.

Be First SEND NO MONEY! SEND NAME & ADDRESS!

NEW CANDID CAMERA GIVEN

SEND NO MONEY

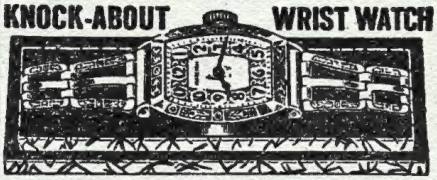
Or Big Cash Commission

A real Candid Camera that gives you 16 perfect pictures on one roll of film. Has a genuine high speed Graf Lens and lightning fast shutter. Yours for SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE beautifully colored art pictures (correct size for framing) with our WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for burns, cuts, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends and neighbors for 25c a box (giving picture FREE) and remitting as per premium catalog. Send today. We trust you. Mail Coupon. Wilson Chem. Co., Inc., Dept. DA-878 Tyrone, Pa.

LADIES! MEN! BOYS!

SEND NO MONEY

KNOCK-ABOUT WRIST WATCH

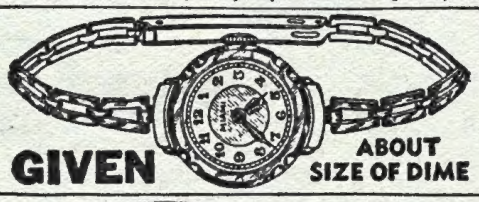


BOTH GIVEN MAIL COUPON

Choice of cash commission. Either chrome finish WRIST WATCH with adjustable bracelet, or, 22 Cal. REPEATING RIFLE GIVEN for selling WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE for burns, cuts, chaps, etc., at 25c a box (giving a beautifully colored art picture FREE) and remitting as explained in catalog. SPECIAL—Choice of twenty premiums for returning only $3.00 collected. 43rd yr. Be first. Send for order on trust, postage paid. Wilson Chem. Co., Inc., Dept. DA-879 Tyrone, Pa.

NOTHING TO BUY - Girls! Ladies! Send Name and Address

Charming Watch or Big Cash Commission. Send No Money. Given for SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE Big Colored Pictures with our well known White Cloverine Salve, used for burns, chaps, sores, etc., easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remitting per catalog. SPECIAL: Choice of 20 gifts for returning only $3 collected. Be first. 43rd year. Write today for order of Salve and Pictures, postage paid. WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. DA-87[illegible] Tyrone, Pa.



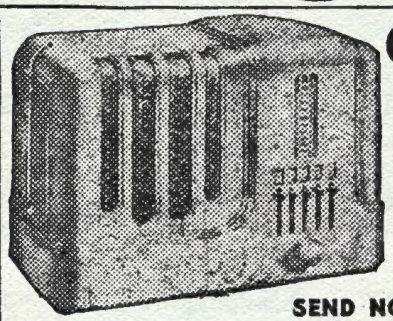
GIVEN **ABOUT SIZE OF DIME**

BIG GUITAR GIVEN

OR BIG CASH COMMISSION
Send No Money—Boys! Girls!

Standard size regulation guitar. Regulated — fretted ebonized finger board — pearl position dots. A MARVEL! Yours for SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE beautifully colored art pictures (correct size for framing) with our WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for burns, cuts, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends and neighbors at 25c a box (giving picture FREE) and remitting as per premium catalog.

SPECIAL Choice of twenty other premiums for returning only $3.00 collected. 43rd yr. Be first. Send today —We trust you. Mail Coupon. Wilson Chem. Co., Inc., Dept. DA-87[illegible] Tyrone, Pa.



GIVEN FIVE TUBE RADIO

Or Big Cash Commission

SEND NO MONEY
Send name and address

Automatic tuning—Superheterodyne—AC-DC—Short Wave—Amateurs, police, and airplane calls. Standard broadcast band. 5 position tuner plus regular tuning knob. Amazing! Yours for SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE beautifully colored art pictures (correct size for framing) with our WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for burns, cuts, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends and neighbors at 25c a box (giving picture FREE) and remitting as per premium catalog. SPECIAL—Choice of twenty other premiums for returning only $3.00 collected. 43rd yr. Be first. Send today—We trust you. Mail Coupon. Wilson Chem. Co., Inc., Dept. DA-87[illegible] Tyrone, Pa.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

WILSON CHEM. CO., Inc., Dept. DA-87[illegible] Tyrone, Pa.
Gentlemen:—Please send me 12 Beautiful Art Pictures with 12 boxes WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE to sell at 25c a box (giving picture FREE). I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per premium plan catalog sent with order, postage paid. Date.....

Name_____

R.D._____ Bx._____ St._____

Town_____ State_____

PRINT YOUR LAST NAME ONLY IN SPACE BELOW

PASTE COUPON on a Penny Postcard or Mail in an Envelope Now!

COMPANION EXERCISER

Exercise is FUN if you do it the Companion Way!

With circulation stimulated, and abdominal muscles freed of cumbersome fat, digestive organs will be able to function better.

The Bonomo COMPANION EXERCISER distributed by BLEIER & BROWN, 1270 6th Ave., Radio City, New York, N. Y.

ONLY $1.00 WITH EXERCISE AND HEALTH CHARTS

It isn't "work" when you exercise with your room-mate, your girl friend or your wife! Here's a simple, new exerciser designed by the famous physical culturist, Joe Bonomo that incorporates the best features of the rowing machine and the pulley weights. It combines fun and exercise because it is made for two people to use at the same time. TWO people benefit from its stretching, limbering, strengthening assistance.

Only 10 minutes a day!

It takes but little time and will help to keep you feeling "fit as a fiddle." Watch the energy, pep and vitality come back. Watch the new sparkle in your eyes, the fresh color in your cheeks. By the end of a week you will count those ten minutes a day as time well spent.

Marvelous for Constipation!

With the "Companion" exerciser you will get just the waistline "toning up" that is needed to keep your digestive organs functioning properly. Help your system to free itself from toxic poisons! Relax your tense nerves and muscles! Start to really "live"!

FREE! If you order at once we will include, FREE of extra charge, special Exercise chart giving full instructions; also a large, illustrated Health chart. Shows you what foods to eat . . . what to do to get more out of life. Contains 12 rules for health and a perfect figure.

Send order today! Companion Home Exerciser, complete with foot loops, only $1. Ready to use . . . no adjustments, no noise, no bother. Sent C. O. D. plus postage or we pay postage if $1 accompanies order. Use it for 5 days . . . if not delighted, your money back without question. Rush coupon today!

BLEIER and BROWN
Distributors of Joe Bonomo Exerciser,
Dept. 6E1, 1270 Sixth Ave., Radio City, New York, N. Y.

Send one Companion Exerciser ready for use, with illustrated Exercise Chart and FREE Health Chart. I will pay postman $1, plus postage. We pay postage if $1 sent with order. If not satisfied I may return the Companion in 5 days and receive my $1 back.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

Canada and Foreign Countries, $1.50 with order

You Can Make Almost 6 Times Your Investment in Your Spare Time!

We have made up this sample package, worth $1.00, and offer it to you for 25c so that you may compare these handsome four-color cards and envelopes with gift shop cards selling at 5c, 10c, and even 15c each. They are attractive and modern in design with unusual verses and sentiments . . . just the sort of cards that are easy to sell at an average of 10c each. Sell this sample package and see how quickly you will have $1.85 clear profit! Or sell the whole box of 21 cards and 21 envelopes for only $1.00 and make a quick profit of 75c! Think of it! A 300% Profit On Your Investment!

AGENTS Earn $17 on an investment of only $3

Sample box.. 25c
5 boxes $1.00
20 boxes $3.00

Remember, we are not retailing these cards at this price. We simply offer you this special package at wholesale rates because we want you to see the wonderful quality and appealing designs that keep them in demand everywhere. We know that once you examine them you will see the tremendous money-making possibilities for spare time selling! Build up a yearly repeat business with this big-profit, high class line!

Send only 25c for sample assortment!

We don't ask you to buy a large quantity . . . we know you will be so delighted with these beautiful cards that we are willing to send you a sample box of 21 cards and envelopes for only 25c! And if you are not completely satisfied, return them and we will refund the 25c. You take no risk and the chances are you will start a very profitable business in your spare time! Get started early . . . mail the coupon with 25c today!

MAJESTIC NOVELTY CO., Dept. DA,
246 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Enclosed find 25c for which kindly send me sample box of 21 four-color illustrated Christmas cards with envelopes. If I am not satisfied I may return them and receive my money back.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

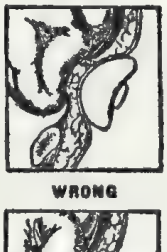
FREE TRIAL of my Rupture Invention

If It Doesn't Stop Your Rupture Worries I'll Take The Loss!

NO STEEL SPRINGS

NO HARD PADS

IN MY BROOKS truss invention there are no steel springs—instead the pad is held in place by a soft body band that is just as comfortable as a glove. In my design there is no hard pad. Instead there is a soft, hollow AIR-CUSHION, firm enough to always hold the rupture just right, yet soft and flexible enough to give perfect comfort without gouging. If you look at the illustrations below you will see what I mean by gouging.



WRONG

A pad that press into the opening absolutely prevents Nature from Healing. The opening cannot close up.

RIGHT

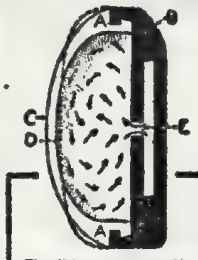
This second illustration shows how the Brooks Invention holds the rupture so that the edges of the ring are close together—close enough for Nature to strengthen and possibly heal.

I SEND you my Rupture Invention on trial because ruptured people have been fooled so many times by quack schemes and worthless "cure-alls" that they don't know what to believe There are as many kinds of rupture trusses as there are blacksmiths. All of the makers CLAIM wonderful and unusual qualities for their products. But I say: "Seeing is believing." If you have a reducible rupture I KNOW what the Brooks will do for you — BUT I won't make any claims. I want you to try for yourself. I'll send it to you on trial. You keep it ten days—at my risk. Lay aside your old truss. Then see how the Brooks Invention gives you these three big advantages. Remember these are not claims. These are the benefits the Brooks MUST bring you before you decide to keep it.

1. Immediate restoration of normal physical activities. Walk, run, bend or stoop without fear of having the AIR-CUSHION pad slip and let your rupture down.

2. A Support so comfortable, so light in weight and inconspicuous, that you soon forget that you are wearing any support at all.

3. It Must hold your rupture in exactly the right position to give Nature the greatest chance to heal—to strengthen the muscles and close the opening. If the broken ends of a bone are not held together the bone will never knit. The same with rupture. If the rupture is not held properly Nature hasn't got a chance.



Flexible Air-Cushion
This is the patented, flexible Brooks AIR-CUSHION. It is made in two parts—the soft rubber bulb (A) which forms the pad which comes in contact with the body, and the light weight disc (B) which holds the pad. (C) shows the shape of the soft rubber pad before it is pressed against the body. The dotted line (D) shows how the pad flattens out under pressure expelling the air through the orifice (E) through which the pad figuratively breathes as it adjusts to conform to different body pressures.

● ● ●

REMEMBER, I don't promise a cure. I don't make any claims. You don't take my word for a thing. You see for yourself and then decide. Send your name quick for my Book and for my Trial order blank. All information is free. There is no charge now or at any other time for all the facts and the free trial plan of this world famous Rupture Invention that has come to thousands of people almost like the answer to a prayer. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate, for you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Send the coupon now and you will soon know what it is like to be Free of Rupture Worries.

H. C. BROOKS, Mgr.
421 State Street
MARSHALL, MICHIGAN

CONFIDENTIAL COUPON

H. C. Brooks, Mgr., 421 State St., Marshall, Michigan.

Dear Sir: Please send me your Book on the Proper Support of Rupture and also your offer of a 10-day Trial of the Famous Brooks. I understand there is no cost or obligation for this information and that my inquiry will be treated in confidence and all material mailed in plain envelope.

Name.....

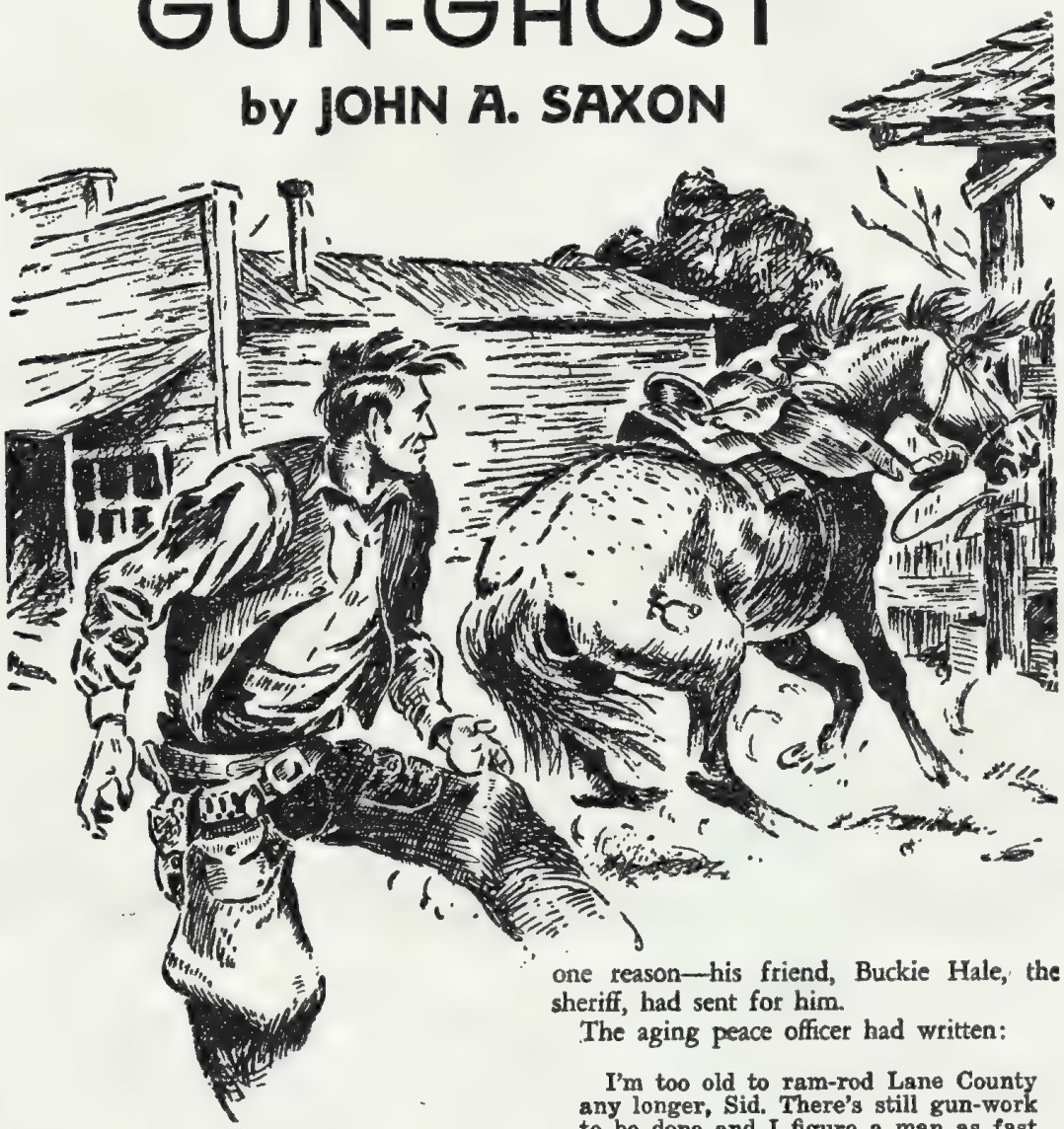
Address.....

City..... State.....

State whether for ☐ Man ☐ Woman or ☐ Child

SHOWDOWN FOR A GUN-GHOST

by JOHN A. SAXON



CHAPTER I

GUN-SLICK

THE man was abusive, insulting—deliberately so, and Sid Doane wondered.

Doane had come into the Silver Nugget saloon unobtrusively, quietly. He wanted no fanfare associated with his return to the town he had left five years before.

Lean, lanky, his face tanned a deep saddle-leather brown by the hot winds of the border country, he had come back to the galleta grass valley of the Santosa for but one reason—his friend, Buckie Hale, the sheriff, had sent for him.

The aging peace officer had written:

> I'm too old to ram-rod Lane County any longer, Sid. There's still gun-work to be done and I figure a man as fast with a .45 as you are will be able to quiet the place down a bit without too much trouble. Unless I have some help —they're figuring on a change.

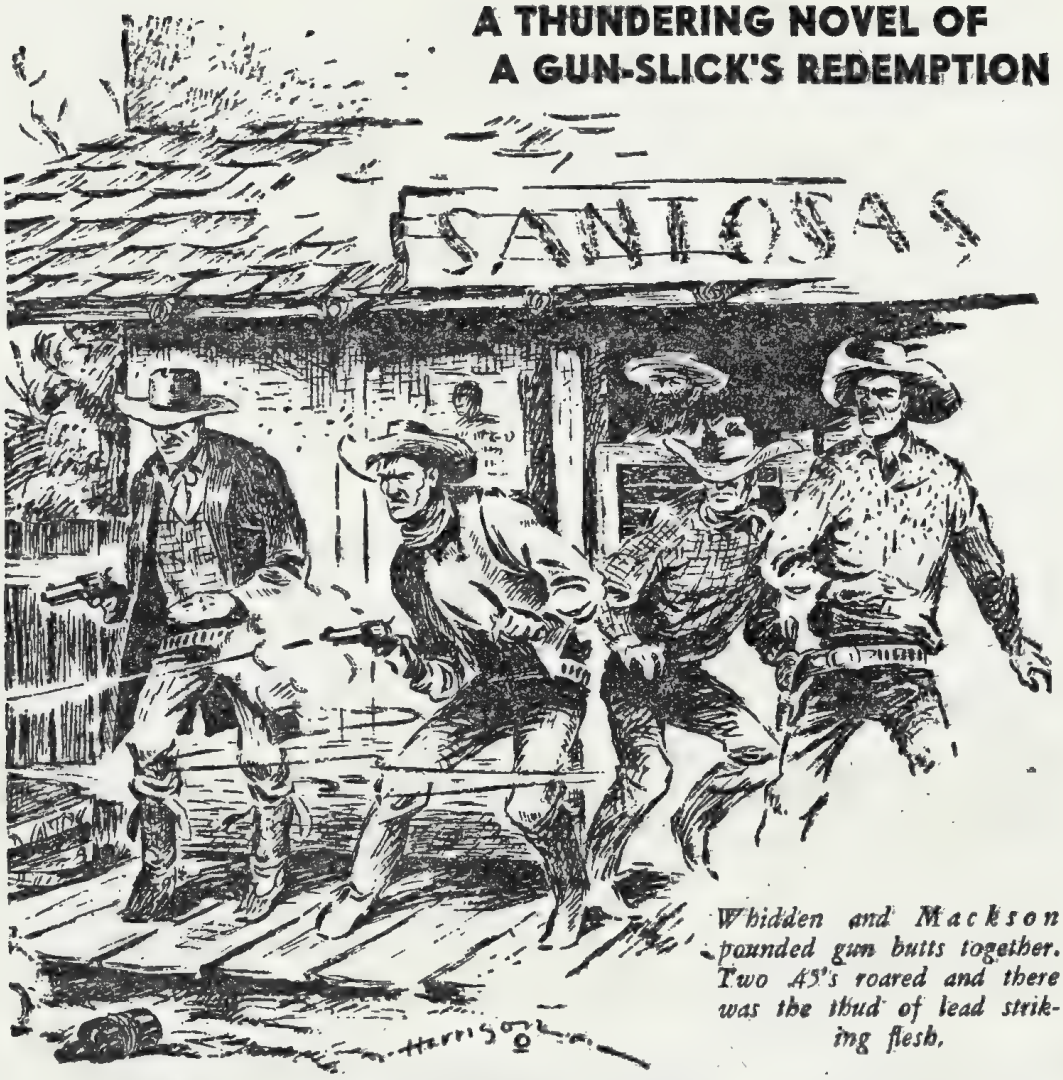
There had been a P.S., too. It had said:

> I know Helen will be glad to see you.

Perhaps it was the postscript as much as the sheriff's appeal that really brought Sid Doane back to the Santosa Valley.

He had wondered about Helen. "Gun-slick" was what she had called him when he left. Gun-slick he had remained—not from choice, but of necessity.

A THUNDERING NOVEL OF A GUN-SLICK'S REDEMPTION



Whidden and Mackson pounded gun butts together. Two 45's roared and there was the thud of lead striking flesh.

Branded "Gun-Slick" after a lifetime of upholding the law was Sid Doane's only gift from the town of Santosa, yet a trigger-weak lawman's Boot-hill plea sent Sid roaring back into the face of death, with guns that were merely ghosts—to face the flaming purgatory of a hell-pack's dry-gulch lead!

Once let a man get the reputation of being a gun-swift, there were always those who challenged, with no more reason than the defy of the ten-year-old who blatantly shouts to a neighbor kid: "I can lick you."

Gun-slick! The fastest man with a six-shooter in all the White Hats of the rangers. From Piedras to McAllen his fame had spread and always he had hated it, because he remembered the scorn in Helen Hale's voice as she used the phrase. Now, that same gun-speed stood between her father and the loss of his job.

Yet neither of them knew, must ever know—

And so Sid Doane came back, only to learn that any man who expected to lawrod the town of Santosa would have to do it from behind gun-smoke.

"Lay offen him, Bill," one of the men at the bar interjected in an apparent attempt to stave off trouble by clumsy humor. "He's uh pilgrim; uh stranger in uh strange land. Them things hangin' on his laigs ain't guns; them's pliers for bobbed wire."

Then, still grinning, he added to Doane, gratuitously: "Bill Whidden's just practicin', stranger. He's goin' tuh be the next sheriff uh Lane County."

So that was it.

The man called Whidden, coarse-featured, with a cast in his left eye that gave him a sinister appearance, did not seem to agree with the other's summarization.

"Pilgrim hell," he said, with a leer. "Since when has Killer Doane been uh stranger to Santosa?"

Quiet greeted the announcement. Doane! Sure, they remembered now. Gunned young Heaton when they were both buttons. Outdrew and out-shot the Trinity Kid. Some said he had joined the rangers so that he could have the law back of his plays.

"Gi'me them guns, Doane," snarled Whidden, "or let's see that fast draw uh yourn. I'm takin' yuh over to the sheriff on uh lead rope. He can't import no border gunny on Santosa."

STILL Sid Doane made no move. Clear enough now. Whidden had been tipped off. Whidden was set for gun showdown right now.

The onlookers sensed that this was not horse-play. There were a dozen men in the saloon, punchers, miners. A dozen drinks on the battered bar-top remained untouched as men shifted position. Boot-heels gritted against rough board flooring. Conversation dropped to clipped whispers.

The desire to pound his hands down on the cedar-butted Colts, outdraw, outshoot the other as he had outdrawn dozens of others, became a searing, almost uncontrollable urge within the breast of Sid Doane, an urge that he knew must be stifled. Those days were behind him. Gun-slick! He could never live it down—

He forced a smile, tight-lipped, mirthless.

"Better take it easy, Whidden," he said slowly, fumbling jerkily with the chin-cord of his sombrero.

Somebody sighed, wheezily. The tension eased. Doane's gesture was that of a man who has backed down.

"Yelluh!"

The almost indistinguishable whisper of a bystander cut Sid Doane to the quick. The psychology of the mob, his was the fate of the man who must always play his part—or be misunderstood.

"I'll go along, Whidden," he said at last, "but—you don't want my guns."

It was a simple statement, yet behind it was a last ditch something that caused Whidden to hesitate, until he whipped himself with the lash of his own ego.

Into his eyes flicked a dangerous light.

"So you're Sid Doane," he sneered, hands on hips. "You're the hombre that Buckie Hale sent for to gun-rod Santosa; the lead slinger that outshot the Trinity Kid. Hell! Gi'me them guns or by God I'll take 'em offen you."

The freezing of Sid Doane's right hand as thumb and forefinger tightened over the chin-cord should have warned Whidden, but it didn't.

"Do I get 'em, or do I take 'em?" Whidden demanded, his lips splitting viciously over yellow teeth.

He seemed to read the answer in Doane's eyes for his right hand slapped down upon the Frontier model Colts stuck in the waistband of his pants. Swift as the darting tongue of a rattler, his hand never completed the movement. Sid Doane, fumbling with the chin-cord, jerked it loose in a flashing move that dazzled the eye. There was a Mexican toston clipped to one end of the cord, a coin with two slots cut through it to use as a fastener. With a single motion Doane snapped the coin on the end of the cord like a sling-shot, straight into one of Whidden's eyes. Pain caused the man to throw both hands over his eyes in a protective gesture. A split second later, Sid Doane had Whidden's gun in his left hand.

"Hold it, Whidden," he ordered, his voice low. "You wanted to see the sheriff; let's get going."

Before the others had entirely grasped what had happened, Sid Doane, with Whidden ahead of him, marched through the batwing doors of the Silver Nugget and started down the street toward where a sign marked "Sheriff" swung from an iron rod in front of a ramshackle jail.

If the advent of Sid Doane had caused no comment, his departure from the Silver Nugget created a situation that was quite the opposite. As soon as they realized what had happened, men tossed off their drinks and followed.

"Sid Doane," somebody commented, incredulously, with a shake of the head. "Supposed to be the fastest man on the draw along the border—and he never even made a pass for 'em."

"Didn't look to me like he needed to," cut in another. "Reckon he didn't figure Whidden was speedy enough for him to dirty a gun on. Damn if I can see how he done it, but—"

What was to happen next seemed to be

the paramount consideration of those who trailed the two men toward the sheriff's office.

Sid Doane was hardly prepared for what he saw when he shoved open the door of the jail. Sitting behind a rickety table littered with papers, was a fair-haired girl of twenty-two, whose dark eyes looked up in puzzlement as Doane pushed Whidden in ahead of him. For an instant her glance met his, recognition flamed.

The years seemed to turn back like the pages of a book. Once before, Sid Doane remembered having seen that same expression in her dark eyes.

"Gunning and killing will never bring peace and prosperity to this valley, Sid," she had told him the day he left. "If you can't give up your guns, you'll have to give up—me."

And Doane, his pulses pounding with the hot blood of youth, had refused to do the thing he felt would make him appear ridiculous in the eyes of all who knew him—hang up his guns for a girl. That night—he had headed for the border.

"Gun-slick," she had called him then—and now, in her stabbing eyes, he read repetition of the charge. Of course she had heard of his life since; of course she knew—

HER glance traveled from the gun in his left hand up to his face, narrowed down to mere slits.

"So, Sid Doane," she said slowly, "you've come back—and with a gun in your hand as you left."

Hot words struggled for utterance. He wanted to explain, to point out the unfairness of it; that the six-shooter he held was Whidden's, not his own. Then, as blood drained from his cheeks, he managed:

"Where's Buckie, Miss Helen? We've got business with him, Whidden and me."

"My father is ill," she cut back, crisply. "He's not here. If there's anything about his work—"

"Call him," snapped Whidden, harshly. "This damn gun-slick hadn't been in town ten minutes before he started trouble. If old man Hale thinks he can import uh border killer for uh deputy, he's got another think comin'. That's the whole trouble with Hale, he ain't man enough to do his own gun work. Well, when I'm sheriff—"

There was something about the tightness around Sid Doane's lips that cut Whidden's tirade short.

"You'd better call Buckie, Miss Helen," Doane agreed. "You wouldn't understand just what—"

Her glance was knife-like, angry.

"I'm afraid I understand only too well," she said, jerking her head significantly toward the gun in his hand. "Once a killer—always a killer!"

The muscles of Sid Doane's throat tightened. He knew what she meant—but that fight had been fair. Young Heaton had gone for his gun first. It was his own life against another's and Sid, in that infinitesimal fraction of a second between life and death—had shot first. Helen, he knew, didn't understand. Wouldn't understand.

Under the scorn of her glance he felt uncomfortable, ill at ease. He shouldn't have come. Why should he try to help the father of the girl who despised him? He had never shot a man except in self-defense or in the discharge of his duty. And now, even that—

Buckie Hale had been asleep in the living quarters adjoining the jail. Aroused by the commotion in the make-shift office he came through the door, gaunt, gray, worried looking. For an instant Sid Doane hardly knew the man who had been his foster-father, who had raised a range waif to manhood. Their eyes met, held.

"What's the trouble, Sid?" he asked finally. One might have thought Sid Doane had been away over night instead of five years. Then the sheriff caught sight of Whidden. His dimming eyes saw Whidden's gun in Doane's hand, and he read between the lines.

"So yuh finally bit off more'n you could chew, eh Bill?" he said to the man, much at one might chide a fractious child. "Take the shells out of his gun, Sid, an' give it back to him. Whidden, if yo're caught packin' uh gun again, you'll be locked up. Yuh don't know how to handle 'em."

There was something akin to a snarl on the lips of Bill Whidden as he replied. He had been humiliated, treated like a child in front of the very men he was trying to impress as appointive timber for the job of sheriff.

"Yuh can't lock me up, yuh old he-goat," he barked angrily.

Something passed between Sid Doane and the old sheriff, something that the older man read in the eyes of the younger, the reading of which brought a smile of quiet satisfaction to his grizzled features.

"Yo're plum' correct, Whidden," he said, slowly. "I'll leave that to Sid Doane, my new depitty."

It was then Sid realized that whatever confidences the sheriff had reposed in his daughter Helen, he had not included in them the fact that he intended to deputize Doane.

Helen Hale made a quick intake of breath, looked from Sid Doane to her father and poured out all her pent-up emotion in one biting phrase:

"Dad! How could you? That—"

Although she left the sentence unfinished, Sid Doane read its completing words as they flashed through her mind. They were: "Gun-slick."

CHAPTER II

DEALT FROM THE BOTTOM

FOR a long time after Bill Whidden had taken his empty gun and stomped angrily out of the office, elbowing his way through the crowd and after Helen had walked out, head high, jerked the tie-rope of her pony loose from the hitch-rail and ridden off, Sid Doane and the sheriff faced each other across the rickety table. Sid told Hale what had happened in the Silver Nugget. The sheriff listened, but offered no comment, asked no questions.

"I'm glad yuh came back, boy," the old man said, and into that one sentence Sid Doane realized the oldster had voiced the depth of his feeling. Buckie Hale, outwardly hard, had never been blessed with a son. He loved Helen as a father loves an only daughter, but it was to Sid Doane, whom he had "raised from a pup" that he naturally turned. He had taught Sid to ride, had galloped stirrup to stirrup with him across the rough country hunting rustler signs; taught him how to handle a gun, stood by him in the resultant trouble over the Heaton killing.

Perhaps too, the old man sensed that it was because of Helen that Sid had left the Santosa Valley. Women were like that, he knew. His wife, hardy pioneer woman that she was, had always decried the constant use of force, the necessity for bloodshed. The work of the law-man was in Buckie Hale's blood—always would be. If he were forced out of his job as sheriff after fifteen years it would, Sid felt, break his heart.

Though Sid Doane sensed what was going through the old man's mind, he gave no indication of that fact.

"I'm sorry, Buckie," he said at last, "but I'm afraid my coming isn't going to help much."

He couldn't explain why; couldn't disappoint the other's expectations.

"Looks like this man Bill Whidden was layin' for me," he added, slowly. "Somebody must have known I was coming."

There was no question in the words and he looked at Buckie Hale as though expecting affirmation.

Buckie shook his head.

"Nobody knew it," he said positively. "The letter I writ was the only time I ever even let it out uh my own head—"

He stopped short, stared at Sid with a puzzled expression.

"Yuh got that letter, Sid?" he asked, and his eyes narrowed.

Doane produced the stained envelope with the single sheet of paper it held, handed it to the sheriff. The old man split the gummed flap, peered at it intently.

"Look at this, boy," he said a moment later, his jaw squaring. "It's been opened an' gummed up ag'in. See them brown specks? That's terbaccy an' I ain't used chewin' fer twenty years. Somebody opened my letter, by gravy, then sealed it up again—"

"I'm beginnin' to see things, Sid," he went on. "Dan Mackson has had a hand in this. He must uh knew you was headed this way, an' Dan Mackson—why uh course. I should uh thought of it before. It ain't the fust time Mackson has tried to use Bill Whidden for his dirty work. That's why he wants Whidden elected sheriff. Mackson owns the bank, though he thinks nobody knows it, and it's money from Mackson's gambling house that's been financin' uh lot uh Lane County mortgages. He cain't very well let it get around to some uh these cattlemen that he's been loanin' 'em back their own money an' doin' it through Tom Hawkins at the bank. I smelled that out uh few months ago when he tried to talk me into some high-handed foreclosures. When I wouldn't have any truck with it, he set out to make Bill Whidden sheriff. Damn me, if I was twenty years younger I'd lay uh gun barrel along that hombre's skull. He'd sell his soul—if he had one—for a couple uh twenty dollar gold pieces."

He looked at Sid expectantly.

"Perhaps that's just the trouble, Buckie,"

Sid Doane replied, thoughtfully. "Lane County has always been run by six-gun law. Maybe it's time we tried some other way."

Buckie Hale slapped his thighs with the flat of both hands in a gesture of annoyance and stood up.

"Now, there you go. That's what Helen's allus sayin'. There's only one argyment men like Bill Whidden and Mackson understan' —uh hot slug uh lead."

He cocked his head to one side and surveyed the other questioningly.

"Yuh know, Sid," he said finally after studying him for a moment, "that sounds queer comin' from uh White Hat, uh Ranger that's allus put fear uh God an' the Law into uh malo hombre with uh pair uh .45s. Ain't goin' soft are yuh?"

Sid shook his head.

"There's other ways, Buckie," he said slowly, and looked away.

How could he tell this fire-eating oldster that for him, there had to be other ways?

Buckie appeared unsatisfied, unconvinced.

"Mebby so, Sid," he gave in grudgingly. "Tricks like yuh pulled on Bill Whidden today is plum' unexpected I'll admit—but they're dangerous. They won't allus work, and when they don't—"

He shrugged his shoulders doubtfully. The inference was plain enough. For fifteen years Buckie Hale had depended upon the speed of his good right hand and the .45 hanging at his hip. Now that age had slowed his draw, dimmed his once bright eye, he might grudgingly acknowledge the lack of his own ability to thus carry the law into an enemy camp, but he still had faith in his method—in younger hands.

"Dan Mackson's got to be stopped, Sid," he said at last. "In another year he'll have Lane County in the flat of his hand—he's almost got it now. Theer's fifty men in this county that'll do anything he tells 'em to—and he's telling 'em plenty. But," he concluded shrewdly, "yuh cain't snap uh chin-cord in Dan Mackson's eyes."

"If you want me to take the job, Buckie," said Sid, refusing to be drawn into further discussion, "it'll have to be on my own terms, and with the understanding I can handle it my own way. Is that agreed?"

"Lane County has got to be cleaned up, Sid," said the old man, reaching into a drawer and pulling out a six pointed badge stamped "Deputy". "I ain't carin' whether yuh use uh six gun uh stick uh dynamite. But jus' remember this, son, Mackson don't play games. He packs uh gun his-own-self, an' because I ain't never seen him smoke it, I'd hate to lay uh bet he wouldn't do it muy pronto. Mackson's back of the wrong element in this county, an' it's Mackson you're up against. Yuh may have bluffed down Bill Whidden, but there'll be others to take his place."

"We'll worry about them when the time comes, Buckie," replied Sid, as he lowered his hand after taking the oath and pinned the badge on his shirt. "I'll be seein' Mackson the first thing in the morning."

THERE was a tight, grim look about the sheriff's mouth.

"Yuh won't have tuh wait that long, Sid," he said, pointing. "Mackson's on his way here and he looks plenty riled."

Sid Doane turned and glanced in the direction indicated. A heavy-set, square-jawed man wearing a black Stetson hat and a frock coat of the style affected by many gamblers throughout the West, was stepping off the raised board sidewalk in front of the Mercantile General Store across the street. He strode with a determined step toward the office of the sheriff of Lane County. At his elbow was Bill Whidden, a satisfied smirk on his coarse features; behind him, a dozen determined looking men.

"Looks like you're right, Buckie," agreed Sid Doane, calmly. "Mackson figures the man that plays the first card takes the lead."

Buckie Hale reached for a pair of .45s swung in twin holsters on a nail near his desk.

"Dan Mackson has got away with all he's going to," he said, between his teeth. "If he wants trouble, he can have it."

"Take it easy, Buckie," returned Sid. "There's more than one way of handling trouble."

With a quick motion he unbuckled his gun belt, hung the pair of six guns on the nail from which Buckie Hale had just removed his own.

A look half of surprise, half of question, flashed in Hale's eyes.

"What the hell—" he began, then halted, abruptly.

Whatever else he may have intended to say was checked by the abrupt entrance of Dan Mackson who kicked open the rickety screen door of the office and burst in like a whirlwind, Whidden and the others at his heels.

"Well, Mackson," clipped the sheriff,

standing with his feet wide apart. "Just what's eatin' on you? Yuh aim to tear down the place, or what?"

"I aim to find out how you figure you can bring uh killer into this town an' set him up as uh depitty," snarled the gambler, levelling a finger at Sid. "Yuh cain't rowel this town with a murderer!"

Sid Doane's face blanched beneath the heavy tan. Harsh words these, to a man who for five years had carried law and order into some of the toughest towns along the Rio Grande.

He slid off the edge of the table where he had parked himself as Mackson entered. It had been his intention to keep silent, let Buckie Hale handle the situation, but this was a personal charge, something that he alone could answer.

He maneuvered himself in such a way that he stood between Mackson and the sheriff and close enough to Bill Whidden to reach out and touch the man.

"Just what do you mean by that, Mackson?" he demanded.

"I ain't talkin' to you, yuh damned killer," shouted Mackson angrily, and Sid noticed that the other's eyes flicked first to his waist, noting the absence of guns. "I'm talkin' to the sheriff."

From the expression upon the faces of the men behind Mackson, Sid Doane gathered that this was no casual accusation. They were grim, sullen.

"Buckie ain't answering for me, Mackson," he countered. "You used the word 'murderer'. I'd advise you to explain—and talk fast."

A sneer swept across the gambler's lips.

"Hadn't yuh better buckle on them guns before you start makin' war-talk?" he asked, indicating the pair of Colts hanging on the wall. "That's your usual way of handling things ain't it?"

"No use bandyin' words with him, Dan," one of the crowd shouted. "The evidence ag'in him is in your hand—if it fits him let's hang the son."

Buckie Hale's hands dropped on his guns, but Sid shook his head when he caught his eye.

Doane reached out and took something from the gambler's hand before the other realized what he was going to do. It was the heel of a boot, a single lift, worn thin on one side. Around the edge were the holes of the nails that had held it in place.

"Here's the same heel print in the dirt," a man outside the door shouted. "I follered it clear across the street. Unless he's changed his boots—"

It was becoming clear to Sid Doane, now, what Mackson had in mind. This boot heel, they seemed to think, tied Sid Doane to something that—

He lifted his foot, looked at the heel of his boot. He hadn't noticed it before but a lift was missing. He reached down, fitted the piece of leather onto the heel. It slipped over the protruding nails, held.

"Anybody could tell it came off my heel," he announced, staring straight at Mackson, "but what does that signify?"

For a moment the silence of the group was surcharged with expectancy.

"Buckie Hale," said Mackson, turning to the sheriff, 'I call on you as sheriff to put Sid Doane under arrest. The body of Win Trimble was found near the XB ranch house an hour after Doane rode into town—just long enough for him to have pushed his horse over the ridge. Boot-heel tracks were found in the dust near the body, and so was this single layer of leather which Doane admits came off his boot, as anybody here can see. There'll be a dozen men who'll testify that Win Tremble and Doane had trouble over your daughter five years ago, and that Doane threatened when he left he would come back some day and kill Trimble. Well, he did."

"That's a damned lie, Mackson," shouted the sheriff angrily, disregarding Sid Doane's warning glance. "You've cooked up this charge against Sid, but you ain't goin' to make her stick. If you want to go to the County Attorney at Red Rock an' make a charge—go ahead; but in the meantime Sid Doane remains my depitty."

ANGER seared through the cat-yellow eyes of the gambler. His fingers clenched and loosened again.

"There'll be no killer totin' a star in this man's town an' roddin' his betters, Hale," returned the boss of Santosa. "How about it, men? Do we handle this or let that long-haired county attorney mess in' an' waste the tax money on a trial? He ain't got his guns to smoke you up—get him!"

As the crowd surged forward, Buckie Hale jerked a gun from its leather, which was as promptly taken from his hand by Sid Doane and tossed through the open door into the living quarters.

"No gun-play, Buckie," he warned. "You

said I could do it my way. Mackson, if you drop your hand another inch—"

The gambler's right snapped downward just as Doane's fist shot straight out from the shoulder.

Mackson went down like a poled ox. For a moment it seemed that the crowd would surge forward and overwhelm Doane, yet there was something in the demeanor of the new deputy that held them.

"You men listen to me," he shouted, shoving the leaders back against the men behind them. "You can't decide a thing like this on such flimsy evidence."

He held the boot-heel aloft in his left hand.

"Who found this?"

Half a dozen pairs of eyes shifted toward a lanky hanger-on around the Silver Nugget, known only as "Slim."

"Where'd you find it, Slim?" Doane asked crisply.

The other's glance wavered.

"Why I—"

Without the moral backing and presence of Dan Mackson, who laid unconscious at Doane's feet, Slim seemed at a loss.

"I—I gave it to Whidden," he stammered, finally.

"You mean Whidden gave it to you," Doane corrected. "Now just one other question, men," he added. "When was that kerosene sprinkled in front of the Silver Nugget to lay the dust?"

The question was not directed to anybody in particular but encompassed every man in the crowd.

"A couple of days ago," somebody shouted.

"What the hell's that got to do with it?" snarled Bill Whidden.

Doane held the piece of leather aloft again and said:

"Just this. If I lost it at the XB where Win Trimble was killed, how do you account for the smell of kerosene on it unless it was still on my boot when I climbed off my horse a couple of hours ago?"

He reached down and jerked the still groggy gambler to his feet.

"I'm arrestin' Dan Mackson for the killing of Win Trimble," he said coldly, shoving the man toward the single cell of the jail.

Not one man of the crowd seemed to care to make an objection for the moment.

CHAPTER III

TRUMP CARDS

SID DOANE'S unexpected move in putting Dan Mackson in jail had a double-barrelled effect upon the little town of Santosa. For one thing it indicated that Buckie Hale intended making a last ditch fight in backing up his deputy, and for another it gave the minority element a vague hope that perhaps all was not lost for the side of law and order.

However, Bill Whidden's parting thrust as the crowd went back to the saloon, divided in its opinion as to whether or not Mackson's charge against the deputy was a put-up job, seemed to voice the sentiment of most. Half in promise, half in threat, Whidden had said:

"You can't get away with this Doane."

If Mackson's under-cover control of things in Santosa had been carefully concealed up to then, the gambler's henchmen brought it out into the open fast enough, because within a few hours, Jim Brainerd, the county attorney from Red Rock, drove his lathered team up in front of the jail and jerked them to a halt.

"What the devil do you mean by throwing Dan Mackson in jail?" he demanded, angrily, as he flung himself out of the buckboard and faced Sid Doane and Buckie. "Don't you know you've made the county liable for a lawsuit for false arrest? Damn it all, you've got me in a hell of a fix."

Sid Doane let the fiery little lawyer say everything he wanted to before he volunteered anything himself.

"Brainerd," he said, finally, "you're not only the county attorney in charge of criminal matters, but you're a practicing lawyer too—and, you represent the Santosa Bank. Right?"

The attorney's eyes narrowed but he waited.

"Of course what you wouldn't want known is that Mackson owns the bank and that the money the Silver Nugget takes in over the gambling tables goes back to the men who lost it—in loans made by the bank and secured by mortgages on their ranches and mines. Mackson had a big hand in getting you elected. Maybe he has promised to make you judge next year. Then he would have things pretty much his own way, wouldn't he? The bank could foreclose the mortgages, the judge could

confirm the sheriff's sale and Dan Mackson would just about own all of Santosa Valley—providing he could control the sheriff! That right?"

Brainerd finally found his tongue.

"I'm not here to discuss personal matters," he stormed. "You've overstepped your authority. Where's your evidence against Mackson on this charge?"

Sid Doane shrugged his shoulders, looked at Buckie Hale with a queer expression.

"Well," he said at last, "the fact of the matter is I only had a hunch."

"Hunch?" exploded the lawyer. "Hunch? Hale, you've got to turn Mackson loose. I'll—I'll do what I can to keep him from suing the county, but I can't promise—"

Buckie Hale looked toward his deputy with question in his eyes.

"Guess he's right, Buckie," said Sid, answering the unspoken query of the sheriff. "I didn't figure Brainerd would butt into the play before I had a chance—"

"Not only that," added the lawyer, sensing that Sid was backing down, and pressing his advantage, "but I'm going to get the county supervisors together tomorrow and have you removed, Hale, unless you discharge this man Doane—right now. He has a reputation as a killer, a gun-man, and this county has no place for such people."

"Brainerd," barked Buckie Hale, unable to contain himself longer, "you run things over in Red Rock and let me handle this end. If you say turn Mackson loose, I'll do it, but while I'm sheriff of Lane County, I'll name my own deputies. I appointed Doane, an' he stays—as long as I'm in office. Maybe he was a little hasty in lockin' up Mackson, but until I'm put out, I'm runnin' things. Now, get the hell out of here and take him with you."

He jerked a key from his pocket, opened the cell door and pulled Mackson out.

"I'll make this county too damned hot to hold either one of you two," the gambler promised as he smoothed his disarranged clothes and touched his jaw, gingerly. "Gi' me my gun."

Doane shook his head.

"You're forgettin' something, Mackson," he said. "There's a law in this state forbidding the carrying of firearms inside the limits of any organized town, except by peace officers. Ask your lawyer friend."

The gambler glanced toward Brainerd for confirmation.

"Why—yes—that is the law," he admitted, "but it never has been enforced."

"Well, it's going to be enforced in Santosa, starting right now," clipped Doane. "You can pass along the word, Mackson. You've been calling me a gun-man. I don't need any guns to clean up this place. When I come downtown I'm coming empty handed. I'll be having business with every man in Santosa packing a gun—and I'll start with you. Is that clear?"

If either Brainerd or Mackson thought of any reply, they did not trust themselves to put it into words. Mackson got into the rig in which the lawyer had arrived and the pair headed for the Silver Nugget a block away.

Buckie Hale shook his head as he watched them go.

"I'm just county sheriff, Sid," he said, as the duo disappeared into the saloon, "an' maybe I don't think as fast as I used to, but damn if I can figure your play. I'll back yuh the limit as long as I can, but it looks like yo're forcin' Mackson's hand. Why'd yuh pull a sandy on him like that anyhow?"

Sid Doane grinned, watching the disgruntled crowd that followed the pair.

"That's just what I am doing, Buckie," Sid admitted, "pulling a sandy. We've smoked Mackson out into the open now and he's mad enough to try anything."

Buckie Hale was plainly dubious.

"Don't be a plum' locoed fool, Sid," he warned, taking Doane's guns down from the nail and holding them out at arm's length. "If you're goin' into town an' make that crack good, yuh'd better go a-smokin', for it means showdown right along the line."

SID looked straight into the eyes of Buckie Hale as he answered:

"But I'm not going into town, Buckie."

Hale laid the guns on the table with a wry look.

"I reckon I might as well turn in my badge," he said, gloomily. "Maybe I'm getin' old, mebby they do things different now, but in my day if uh peace officer made a play like you just made, he buckled on his guns an' dealt the cards."

"That's just what I intend doing, old-timer," said Sid, patting the other on the shoulder. "I'm going to deal the cards—but not the way Mackson expects. The whole town is waiting for me to make gun-play. And that's the difference between your way and mine—Im not going to do what they expect. Mackson will make the

next move — and he'll make it soon."

He took one of the guns, used it as a hammer, and pounded the heel back in place. Then he looped belt and guns over his arm.

"Meanwhile," he added as he stepped outside and untied his horse, which he had led across the street after the run-in with Whidden, "I'm riding up to the XB ranch."

"I'll go with yuh, then," returned the sheriff. "If yo're plum' set on flyin' into the face of providence—"

Sid Doane laughed, hung the guns over the saddle horn. "You'll do nothing of the sort, Buckie," he negotiated. "Take a pasear through town. Mackson expects me to make the next move. See what you can find out."

"But why in tarnation are yuh goin' to the XB. Win Trimble is dead. Yuh cain't do nothin' there—"

"I got reasons," said Sid, flatly. "You say there's been rustling going on. How'd they get the cattle out? There's only two ways, one through town and Gun Shot Pass, which they didn't use, and the other is over Bear Pass. To go that way they'd have to cross the XB. Supposing Win Trimble got wind of something. What would the rustlers do? They'd do just what I think they did—give him a dose of lead. Who'd try to cover up by turning suspicion on me? The men who did the job wouldn't they?"

"You mean you think Mackson is tied in with it somewhere?"

"I don't know," confessed Sid. "If he didn't have a hand in it, he knows who did it and why. It's part of our job to investigate, and I'm going to have a look-see."

"All right," sighed the sheriff, "but don't be a damn fool. Use yore guns."

Doane shook his head. Buckie Hale gave up and walked down the street.

As he watched him go, Sid Doane wished that he could tell him why he couldn't use those .45s. He would have given anything in the world to do the very thing Hale suggested—strap the Colts to his thighs and start them smoking against the enemies of law and order as they had always been used in the past. But Buckie was depending on him; depending on the reputation Sid Doane had built up for being a fast man with the guns. He couldn't let Buckie down and tell him that never again would he feel the buck of a six-shooter.

Halfway across the street Buckie Hale had turned and in the three words he spoke there was something that brought a half choke into the throat of Sid Doane.

"Be careful, son," the sheriff had said.

That was all—but in those three words Buckie Hale had expressed everything that was in his heart.

He watched the grizzled old man, his shoulders stooped with age, as he swung through the doors of the Silver Nugget. He hoped to God that when the time came, he could go out as unafraid as he knew old Buckie Hale would face the end. A brave man, that oldster—a man to ride the river with.

He swung a leg over the paint horse and neck-reined the animal away from town. A hundred yards from the jail he met Helen.

"I've just heard what happened," she said flatly. "You talked your way out of that very cleverly, Mister Doane."

Sid flinched a little at that "mister."

"I want you to know," she continued, and her voice was as cold as a winter wind, "that if anything happens to my father, I'll blame you for it as long as I live."

"You—surely, you don't think I killed Win, do you, Helen?" he asked seriously.

She shook her head.

"I don't know," she replied. "My dad is carrying his guns for the first time in a year. I had hoped he never would use them again. I can thank you for that—and I hope the day will come when you'll have to face the crisis of your life—without a gun!"

She walked into the little house that served Santosa both as a jail and sheriff's residence, without a backward look.

For a long moment Sid Doane watched the darkened frame of the doorway. If Helen Hale could have known what his heart held at that moment she would have given a good deal to have been able to recall the words.

CHAPTER IV

SLOW DRAG GUNMAN

IT WAS with a troubled mind that Sid Doane headed out of town toward the XB ranch. Perhaps, he told himself, it would have been better to have told Buckie Hale the truth—that the .45s on Doane's hips when he came into town, swinging now from the saddle horn and bumping his leg in constant reminder with every step of the horse, were, to Sid Doane—ghost guns. Through his head ran the biblical passage

that "He who liveth by the sword shall die by the sword."

"Yellow," the whisperer had said in the saloon. Was he yellow, he asked himself, in taking temporary refuge behind the unwritten law of the West that an unarmed man must not be gunned? For himself he did not care, but there was that graying oldster, Buckie Hale, faced by the loss of his job, his only source of livelihood and there was—Helen. She was unreasonable, stubborn, as set in her way as Buckie Hale was in his. What about Helen if Buckie lost his job as sheriff?

He stopped the paint horse, leaned on the saddle horn and stared across the flower-studded grass valley of the Santosa. Always his return to the valley had been the thing that had kept him going in those lurid days along the border; the peace, the quiet of old Santosa before the advent of Dan Mackson. Perhaps, too, there had been a memory of Helen. Even as a gangly youngster she had given promise of a beautiful womanhood and now she fulfilled every picture he had conjured up of her as he sat staring into the moonbeams that shimmered across the Rio Grande on long nights of vigil. Now she hated him. It was written into every gesture, every scorching glance.

Gun-slick! He laughed aloud. What a joke—what a soul-searing, heart-rending joke! He, Sid Doane—gun-slick! A man whose mere presence with those death-dealing .45s strapped down to his thighs had been enough to strike terror and a sudden desire for peace into the hearts of the most intrepid of badmen in two states. . . . Yet, Buckie Hale needed those guns, needed them to save his job, despite the scorn of Helen's eyes.

He slipped out of the saddle, took the guns off the saddlehorn and with an almost furtive glance to be sure that he was not observed, fastened the belt buckles, tied down the hanging leg-thongs.

He dropped into a half crouch, his hands slapped for the butts, then froze with the heavy Colts half out of the holsters as an expression of agony and pain distorted his tanned face. He dropped his hands slowly to his sides, bowed his head silently. The medico in El Paso, who alone knew Sid Doane's secret, had been right. Sid Doane, whose flashing draw was almost legend, would never again pull a gun!

Slowly the deadening hurt left his arms and fingers, yet remained in his heart.

The words of the surgeon, burned indelibly upon his memory, came back to him.

"The greaser's knife missed the spinal cord, Doane," he had said, as he rendered his verdict, "but it cut a nerve that will prevent you from moving either elbow back of your hips without a lot of pain. I'm afraid it means you'll never be able to draw a gun again with any speed."

He had scoffed, rebelled at that. Supposing he couldn't make a straight draw. He would develop a cross pull that would be even faster.

Hours he practiced. Twice his leave was extended. Nobody knew, nobody suspected. The physician had been sworn to secrecy.

Then Buckie's letter and he had resigned from the White Hats to come back to Santosa. A lot of good he was going to do Buckie Hale. A reputation, yes—but always there would be someone to challenge that gunspeed. It was like a game.

There was a weary set to his shoulders as he unstrapped the guns, hung them over the saddlehorn again and climbed into the leak.

The XB spread laid in a triangular shaped draw, eastern point of which climbed through the foothills into Bear Pass. Stopping his horse half a mile from the ranchhouse where he could survey the scene, he studied the terrain. It wasn't possible, he assured himself, that the stolen cattle could have left the valley without going through Bear Pass and the XB.

Sid Doane had never liked Win Trimble even when they were kids. In a country where boys learned to chew tobacco at ten, Win Trimble had earned the sobriquet of "nasty nice." He'd always back out of a fight, always have something else he had to do when the other kids were up to any deviltry that meant a possibility of being caught and punished. Back of it all, Sid had always wondered whether or not it hadn't been just a mask. He had no proof Trimble was hooked up with the rustlers, now way of getting such proof now, even if it had been true. He was following something that was no stronger than a hunch. After all, he was Buckie Hale's deputy, an officer of the law, and a killing had been done.

He picked up the reins and clucked the paint down the slope.

Two men were in the yard in front of the ranch rigging-shed when he rode in. They surveyed him surlily, noted the star on

his shirt, looked at each other and shrugged.

"I'm Sid Doane, Buckie Hale's deputy," he said directly, stepping out of the saddle. "I want some information about the killing of Win Trimble."

One man, whose beard was tobacco stained, spat copiously.

"There ain't much to tell, mister—except what I guess yuh already know."

If there was a double meaning in the remark, Sid chose to ignore it.

"Where's the body?" he asked, walking toward the house.

"Doc Stone came up from town and took it over in the buck-board," answered the second man. "I'm Jed Wickmire, ram-roddin' the spread in case yo're interested."

There was something about the attitude of the two men that jarred upon Sid's sensibilities as a lawman. There was no reason for their apparent resentment of the visit.

There was, however, something else—an indication that a team of horses had stood in front of the porch a few minutes before. Neither the rig nor any sign of it was in evidence now. Sid calculated it could not have been gone over ten minutes—

"What time did Doc Stone get the body?" he queried.

"'Round noon-time," was the answer, "four or five hours ago."

He took a few steps toward the house and dropped his lids to mask his sharpening glance as one of the men almost too casually moved in ahead of him.

THERE was some reason why they did not want Sid to go in the house!

"Reckon I'll have to ask one of you boys to show me just where Win's body was found," Sid suggested, walking toward the end of the porch and noting the apparent relief with which his request was greeted.

"Be glad to do that, sheriff," said Wickmire, and Sid wondered at the unnecessary emphasis upon the official designation. Was Wickmire raising his voice to warn somebody—?

"Bide Allen, here," said the foreman, indicating the other man with a jerk of his head, "found the body—right here."

He indicated a spot in front of the rigging shed.

"What time?" was Sid's next question.

"I guess it must uh been about six o'clock," cut in Allen, and a glance flashed between the two that Sid Doane caught, although apparently he was looking at the ground at the point indicated.

That tallied all right, he told himself. He could have passed through the XB at that time as the gambler had charged he had, killed Win and then ridden into Santosa.

But there were other things, which to an experienced lawman like Sid Doane, did not tally.

In the bunkhouse, twenty-five feet away, a pair of socks hung from a nail near one of the bunks. They were heavy woolen things that were still damp. He felt of them, figuring that the owner must have washed them the night before.

"Who slept in the bunkhouse last night?" he questioned.

There was an instant of hesitation upon the part of Allen before he replied. "I did. Them's my socks. All the rest of the boys are out with the wagons—"

Sid knew Allen was lying. The socks were at least size twelve and Allen was a small man weighing not over a hundred and thirty. Sid figured that he wouldn't wear over a size eight shoe at most. But Wickmire's feet were ample enough for the size twelve socks. Not only that but two of the bunks showed indication of occupancy.

"And you didn't hear anything?" he questioned.

"Nary a thing, mister," replied Allen. "They must have plugged Win somewhere else an' brung him in here. He was supposed to be in town last night."

"Killed clean, eh?" prodded the deputy.

"Plumb between the eyes," was the response.

Which simply clinched what Sid Doane already suspected for his keen eyes had spotted a tiny pool of blood half covered by the dust of the yard. He was sure now that neither of the men were telling the truth. If Allen had been asleep in the bunkhouse he would have heard the shooting if Win Trimble had been killed on the premises and if he was telling the truth. Trimble hadn't been shot somewhere else and his body brought to the ranch as had been suggested. In that event the tell-tale blood-spot would not have been there, for dead men do not bleed!

Sid Doane turned away.

"Guess there ain't much I can do here," he said, as he walked toward his horse. "Whoever done it got away."

He swung aboard the paint, neck-reined

the horse back in the direction from which he had come.

But Sid Doane's actions were not in accord with what was in his mind. His sharp ears had heard something for which he had been listening ever since the men so obviously indicated they did not want him to enter the house. That something was the sound of a team being driven away from the clump of cottonwoods a hundred yards back of the ranch-house.

He waved at the men slightly, touched spurs to the paint and galloped away.

A mile from the house and out of sight, he turned the horse sharply in the opposite direction, fed iron and raced down a grassy valley, the heavy galleta muffling any sound of the horse's hoofs. He intended to see who was in that rig, why they had left secretly and—

Two miles further on, cutting a predetermined angle which would intercept the rig, he had the answer. Galloping along a trail on the opposite side of the valley he spotted what he sought. Even at that distance he could tell who the passengers were—Dan Mackson and the county attorney.

"Pues bueno, senores," he muttered in Spanish. "You an' the law are goin' to have words."

He sunk the rowels so savagely it galvanized the paint into sudden action. It was a move that should not have unseated a man who rode with the ease of Sid Doane. Yet he slumped in the saddle, tumbled to the ground. The paint horse stopped, looked back questioningly.

With reasoning power, the horse might have coupled the fall with the faint, distant crack of a Winchester.

A blood throbbing red welt on Sid Doane's temple dried brown in the hot sun.

CHAPTER V

NO-GUN SHOWDOWN

THE coppery sun dropped lower and lower behind the mountains. Shadowy fingers crept out from the foot-hills, enveloped the crumpled form of the man. Finally Doane stirred, painfully conscious. He struggled to a sitting position, touched his head gingerly with the tips of his fingers.

"Bush-whacked," he muttered, angrily. "And I walked right into it like a chump. If I could have caught up with them, nailed them on the spot, I might have had a chance to pin them down to something. Now—they'll deny being anywhere around here."

The paint horse, noticing movement on the part of the man, raised its head.

Sid whistled and the animal came closer, permitted Doane to climb into the saddle.

For a long moment Sid contemplated the guns still hanging at the saddle-horn, seemed about the strap them on once more, then made a negative gesture and kneed the horse toward town.

He approached Santosa from the northeast, managed to get to the sheriff's office without being observed.

Helen, who was in the other part of the building, heard him come in and entered the office, a frown on her face.

"A fine lawman you turned out to be," she said, withering scorn in her voice. "My father is in the other room with a bullet in his chest. Doc Withers was just here and—he may die. If he does—you'll be to blame, for it, Sid Doane, you and your vaunted six-guns. Whidden shot Dad in the Silver Dollar saloon."

Sid passed his hand over aching temples, answered the unspoken question in her glance.

"Somebody bushwhacked me," he said. "I—"

"Pull yourself together, Sid Doane," the girl said, and it seemed that some of the rancor was gone from her voice. "You're supposed to be my father's deputy, but you're not going to be for long. Hear that crowd? They're planning to lynch you for killing Win Trimble. Are you going to bring in Bill Whidden for shooting my father, or—"

She reached for a pair of six-guns on her father's desk.

"These guns were his," she said, huskily. "If he never wears them again—"

"But, Helen," Doane said, wonderingly. "You've always said—"

For just an instant her glance softened, then became brittle again.

"I've been wrong, Sid," she replied, and in that one instant she seemed very close to him. "So was my mother. You and dad were right. There is only one law these men understand—the law of the six-gun."

She went out and got his guns from the

saddle-horn of the paint, held them out to him.

"I'll take back everything I ever said, "Sid," she said, humbly. "Here are your guns. Go get the man that shot my father!"

Dumbly, wonderingly, he took them. Across the street he heard the rumble of many voices; shouts of, "Let's get the son!" Those cries, he knew, were uttered by men thirsting for his blood.

For a long instant he hesitated. To walk into the face of that mob, knowing that the guns at his side were but wraiths of a former day, would be to court death. Yet that would be preferable to the scorn of Helen Hale if he failed her now.

Silently he took the guns from her hands, buckled them about his waist, tied down the buck-skin strings that held them tight to his thighs.

"Yellow," they had called him, and it still rankled.

He remembered the set of Buckie Hale's shoulders as he had left him that day, his battered guns swinging, butts out, as he walked. Had Buckie's dimming eyes and faltering hand clouded the oldster's courage? The answer to that question came in a groan from the next room, from a doughty little law man with a .45 slug in his chest.

"I'll be back, Helen," he said, and his voice was rough, harsh. "Buckie will be all right. Tell him—I went to get Mackson and Whidden both."

He didn't look back. If he had he would have seen a light in the eyes of the girl that would have told him much. It makes a difference when violence strikes close to home. It had made a difference to Helen Hale.

They saw him coming; the clamor ceased for the moment.

In the middle of the street outside the Silver Dollar, he stopped. He was a sorry looking spectacle, this once-White Hat Ranger. Blood had flowed down the side of his face from the crease over his temple, dried in a brownish stain in the mat of a two days' beard.

"There he is," the cry went up. "There's the snake that killed Win Trimble. Scotch the snake, boys—"

Doane did not move. Legs wide apart, he stood flat-footed in the middle of the street.

"I want Bill Whidden," he shouted at the crowd. "Does he come out or do I come in and get him? Mackson, too—I want them both."

There was a movement at the rear of the group and they gave way right and left. Whidden, with Mackson at his elbow, came to the edge of the wooden sidewalk. Belted to their waists were six-guns.

"Well, well," sneered Mackson. "Look who's comin' calling. The lawman uh the Rio Grande."

"You're packin' guns, you two," answered Doane, evenly, "but that's not what I want you for. Whidden plugged Buckie Hale. Mackson, I jailed you once for killing Win Trimble. This time the charge will stick—"

A man laughed, jeeringly.

"Fightin' words, Doane," somebody shouted. "When Whidden is sheriff, there'll be less talk."

"Whidden will never be sheriff," said Doane, and his words were almost a snarl. "The first man to move can take a chance on that draw Whidden sneered at. You're two to one, but I'm taking you, if it's the last thing I ever do."

Something pounded in his brain, echoing the words. Would it be the last thing—?

THERE was a quick shuffling of feet as men cleared away behind the pair, hustling out of the line of fire.

Step by step Doane advanced. There was something about his measured stride that seemed to strike terror to the heart of Bill Whidden. Through his mind seemed to race every story he had ever heard of the steel of this man's courage, his ability with a six-gun. Braggart, gun-slick that he was, confident of his own ability, Whidden hesitated to test a draw with Doane. He was shaken by the super nerve of this man who was walking up against two men, two guns—Doane couldn't hope to outshoot them both—yet, on he came.

"I'm waiting," repeated the deputy. "Surely one of you gents can plug me. I'll get the other one, of course. Which will it be? Or will you both try together—"

Almost like the whisper of death he heard the single word hiss from Whidden's lips.

"Now!"

As both men pounded gun-butts, Sid Doane, without reaching for his own guns, flung himself sideways. Two .45s roared

as one and there was the thud of lead striking flesh.

A splash of crimson stained Doane's shirt as he plunged to his knees, rolled over. He had pitted the alacrity of his jump against the speed of a bullet—lost.

But, as he rolled over in the dust of the road he came up with a .45 in his right hand—a .45 that roared savagely with a dual explosion which was so rapid that the second shot seemed like the continuing blast of the first.

Whidden and the gambler went down together. They did not hear the mumbling words of the wounded deputy who, supporting himself now on his shattered left arm, while a rivulet of blood wormed down his forearm, said:

"I gave you your chance, gents, and—then I—took mine—"

Nor did they hear the steady voice of Helen Hale, facing the crowd fearlessly, a Winchester in her hands.

"It was a fair fight, men," she cried. "Doane's hurt. Help me get him to the doctor."

A dozen of the men who a moment before had clamored for Sid Doane's life lifted him tenderly, carried him to Doc Wither's office over the feed store.

Half an hour later, the wound dressed, Sid Doane sat on the edge of the makeshift operating table.

"Dad's conscious, Sid," said Helen, who had been back to the jail. "He wants to see you. Says if you can't keep order in this town—"

There was a light touch in her voice that made Doane's heart leap.

"Damn it, Doane," said the little old doctor, testily. "Bring your elbow back here so I can put a sling on—"

He grabbed Doane's arm, pulled it back, noted the quick spasm of pain that spread over the deputy's face.

"Hm-m-m!" he said, wisely. "So that's it!"

Searching fingers probed Doane's spine, stopped on scar tissue.

"Doane," he said, finally. "You'll never be able to get your elbows far enough back to pull a gun again—in fact you haven't been able to for a long time—"

In the quick flashing glance of Helen Hale, Sid Doane knew that she had heard, understood. Nothing else mattered.

"Think you can walk to the office?" asked the girl as they reached the street.

"With a lot of help," he grinned, putting his good arm around her shoulder. "Who's that in front of the jail?"

"Oh," she said calmly, "that's Ward Temple. "You see, dad had another deputy over in the west end of the county. He sent word to him before he went over to the Silver Dollar to play your hunch and look things over at the XB. Ward chased Jed Wickmire after he shot you, caught him and scared him half to death. He confessed everything. Mackson stood in with the rustlers and Win was his right hand man. They quarreled and Mackson shot him, then tried to put the crime on your shoulders."

Sid Doane nodded.

"Looks like the sheriff of this county has a lot of help," he commented, slowly.

"Uh-huh," she agreed, opening the door for him. "But dad's going to resign now, he says, and—"

SHE stopped short, color mounting in her cheeks.

"I'll bet he said something about keeping the job in the family," countered Sid with a grin.

Helen avoided his eyes.

"Why don't you ask him?" she questioned, softly.

But he didn't. He asked her.

A handful of ragged, back-to-the-wall townsmen elected Cliff Rudd, head money fugitive as Marshal of their overrun outlaw town—to guard them and their half-starved families against the guns of a renegade horde's colt-crazy legion.

Don't miss this smashing new novel by

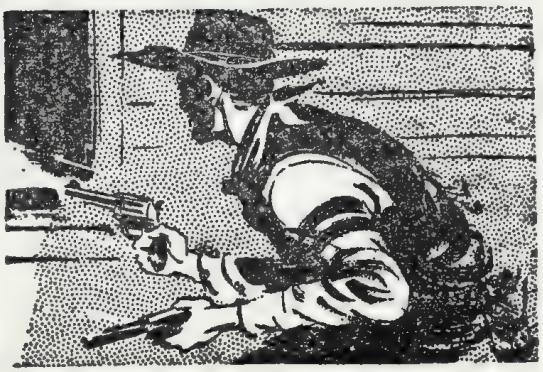
G. W. BARRINGTON
THE MARSHAL OF BLACK ROCK

Also a thrilling new novel of the untamed frontier, of a gun-medico in a roaring town

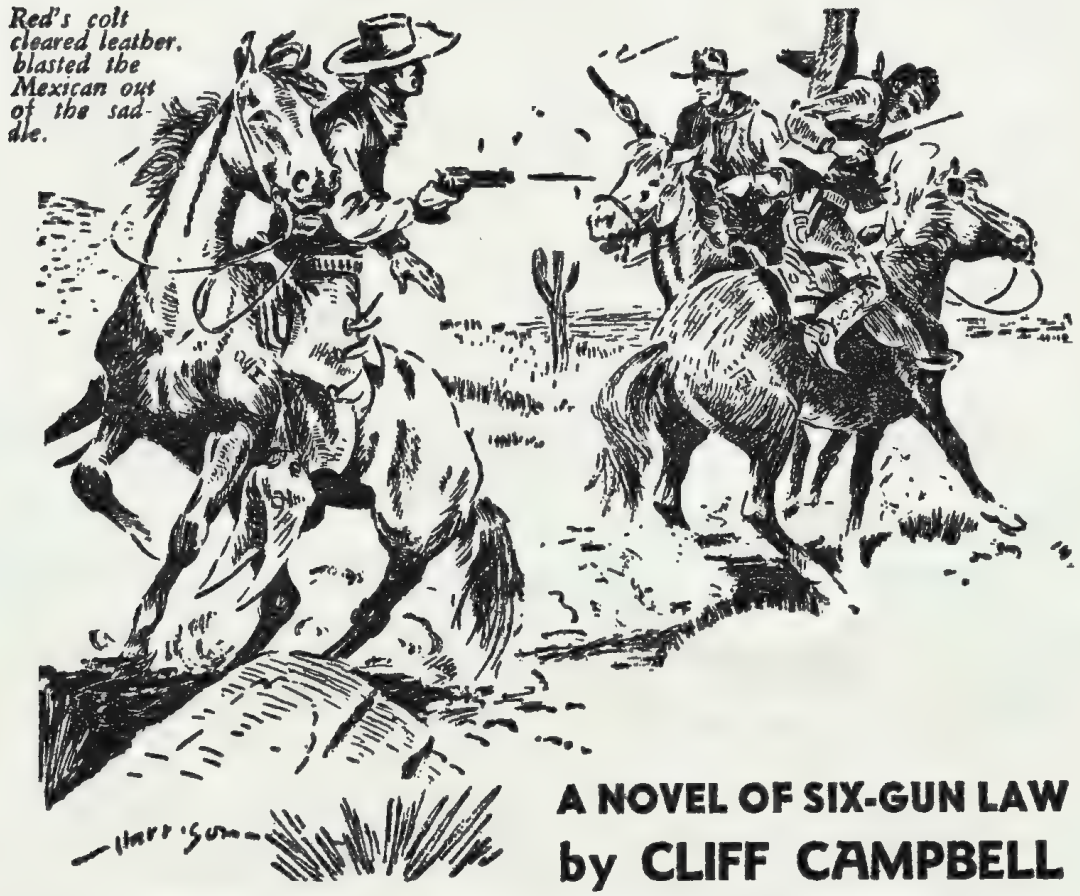
THE GUN-MEDICO FROM HELL'S CORNERS
By ED EARL REPP

DOUBLE-ACTION
WESTERN

January Issue, Now on Sale



RECRUITS FOR BOOT-HILL



Red's colt cleared leather, blasted the Mexican out of the saddle.

A NOVEL OF SIX-GUN LAW

by CLIFF CAMPBELL

CHAPTER I

PLACE, Magdalena, New Mexico. Scene, the long fore-and-aft lobby of the Hotel Aragon. Time, a lazy late April morning, with the warm tang of spring in the air, and the thin overnight fall of snow already completely dissipated. This meant muddy roads.

The stocky, genial proprietor sat behind the cigar counter casting up his books. Only two other people were in the lobby. A young man, roughly dressed, with crisp red hair shoved back from a sunburned face, sat with his chair tipped back against the wall and both legs curled about the rungs. His face was open-eyed and innocent, sometimes; this was one of the times. At his side sat an admiring elderly lady, obviously an Eastern tourist. She was the type of spinster extremely occupied with everyone else's business.

"So you are a real cowboy!" she exclaimed gushingly. "I suppose you have a nickname —perhaps a blood-curdling title gained in desperate ways?"

"Yes'm," said the young man, and swallowed hard. He seemed suffering. "Some folks call me Hellfire Jake, on account of me shooting up some bad men over to Albuquerque last year."

The good woman's eyes widened. "What

When two ruthless killer factions clashed to settle in powdersmoke the sovereignty of bleak, bullet-swept Magdalena, New Mexico—that ex-bronc busting, free-booting, law-bringer, Red Regan, was to lose the one girl he ever loved, and destine for a Boot Hill grave his own best friend.

a terrible country!" she murmured. "But do tell me, young man—have you had a romance? Perhaps you're in love with some rancher's daughter, or some dashing schoolteacher of the great plains?"

With a solemn air, the young man produced a wallet from his pocket. He opened it, and brought forth a folded paper. From the paper he unwrapped a dried, pressed flower. It was a hairy little flower and stem, the faded petals of a bluish cast.

"This," said the young man, regarding it mournfully, "holds my heart's story, ma'am."

"How romantic!" The lady from the East clasped her hand soulfully. "Won't you tell me about it, Hellfire Jake? Do! You may confide in me."

"Something tells me that, ma'am," said the young man.

He lifted his eyes—those blue eyes were wide and innocent and sorrowful—and stared vacantly at the street. Out in front of the hotel was standing a large and none too clean touring car, and Hellfire Jake was thinking to himself that he had better get that extra sparkplug and a spare can of oil before hitting the muddy Datil Canyon road toward St. John's and the Arizona line. Only a mournful retrospection showed in his face, however.

"The story of a puncher's heart!" exclaimed the lady. "Ah, tell me!"

Just in time to hear this exclamation, a very large and burly man came into the lobby from the side entrance, behind the pair, and unseen by them. Catching the words, he paused to stare with interest. His mouth opened and stayed open as he sighted the profile of Hellfire Jake. An expression of amazed recognition came into his face. He was muddy, unshaven, and in one hand carried a pair of heavy leather driving gauntlets.

"Yes'm," said Hellfire Jake obediently. He wrapped the pressed flower in its paper again and laid it in his lap, and rolled a cigaret. "You see, ma'am, there was me and Sonora Pete, and both of us courting the Rose of—of Socorro. Maybe you know Socorro, ma'am? After you go through the Blue Canyon, and Rose, she lived up on the side of the canyon, where her dad had a duck farm."

THE new arrival blinked slightly, and then his helpless amazement passed into a grin. He softly stepped to one side, and waited, listening intently.

"A duck farm!" exclaimed the lady. "How romantic!"

"Yes'm," said Hellfire Jake, and sadness crept into his voice. "One day the Rose, she gives me this flower as a token of her love. We planned to elope and be married. But I was only a poor cow-puncher, and her dad was a rich duck-farmer, and Sonora Pete was a rich gambler, and what chance did I have, I ask you? Nary a chance, ma'am."

"My poor boy! But she loved you!" cried his fervent auditor. "And love laughs at—"

"Love sure does laugh sometimes, ma'am. Sonora Pete carried her off. I chased him. I caught him three miles out of Las Vegas and put six bullets through him, yes'm! And as he was dying, the reptile pulled a gun out of his hatband and shot square at me. What saved my life? Rose, my poor Rose! She flung herself in front of me and the bullet hit her, and she died in my arms, ma'am. And now if you'll excuse me, I'll go out and look at the glorious horizon and maybe try to forget my grief. It's right kind o' you t' listen t' a poor cow-puncher's story, ma'am. So long."

Hellfire Jake slid out of his chair. Perhaps he was afraid he would be further detained, for he lost no time reaching the door and getting out into the street. The good woman gazed after him with unconcealed emotion; so did the big burly man, but not with the same emotion. A sigh broke from the lady, then she rose and departed to her upstairs room.

The big man went up to the cigar counter and slapped his gauntlets down, and his voice boomed out like a bass bell.

"Hi, Herman! Durn your hide, wake up!"

The proprietor came out of his chair and beamed, as he shook hands.

"Why, if it ain't Colonel Higgins! Gosh sake, Colonel, where'd you spring from? Ain't seen you in three-four years—how's the Two Bar H comin' along, huh? And what the Sam Hill are you doin' over in this part of the state? Thought you was rooted for life up north."

"Reckon I am, Herman," and the colonel chuckled expansively. "I been down to El Paso. Drove over from Socorro this morning. By gosh, d' you remember when there wasn't no auto road up Blue Canyon, huh? Remember what plumb hell it used to be after a rain? Well, durned if I didn't come up at twenty mile an hour all the way, and a melted snow underfoot! I got me a big car, yes sir, and she goes hellamile, you bet."

"She would if you drove her, Colonel," and Herman grinned.

"Look here," exclaimed Higgins suddenly, "when did Sheriff Regan blow into this town?"

"Huh?" Herman stared at him blankly. "Who's Sheriff Regan?"

"Shucks! You know Red Regan of Arizona."

"Oh, him! Nope, don't know him, but I've heard of him. He ain't been here, Colonel."

"Why, durn your eyes, I seen him setting right here five minutes ago! Slim, red-haired jasper, bright blue eyes."

"Oh, him! You mean that guy. He ain't Regan." Herman jerked his thumb at the car before the hotel. "He's chambermaid to that there automobile, running her for a party of tourists heading west. Blew in from Albuquerque yesterday."

Colonel Higgins looked bewildered, then he swore heartily.

"Listen here, Herman, there's some mistake. I've known that boy ever since he was weaned. He was elected sheriff of Solvang County eight months ago. He's owner of the Star In A Box ranch down near the border. He was in the state rangers and cleaned up on the Pierro gang. He's a well-known man, Herman. He ain't chauffeur of no tourist car."

"Hm!" ejaculated Herman. "There's a whole passel o' tourists. This kid's name is Smith. He's their driver, I tell you. There he comes now."

COLONEL HIGGINS glanced around, saw Hellfire Jake at the door, and slipped around behind the big rack of picture postcards, out of sight. The young man strode down the lobby, whistling to himself, and stopped before the cigar counter.

"Gimme some smoking," he ordered, laying down a coin. "No sign from my folks yet?"

"Just come down to breakfast," sa[illegible] Herman. Colonel Higgins stepped out.

"You and the Rose of Socorro," boomed his voice, so that Hellfire Jake whirled and stood staring amazedly at him. "You and Sonora Pete. You and your durned grief—holy hellcats! If you ain't the durn'dest liar ever come out o' Hassayamp! H'are you, Red?"

"Whoop! Dog-gone your dirty face, Tom Higgins!" Regan exploded in a yell of joy and gripped the big hand extended to him. "Where'd you blow in from?"

"Points south. Stopped over here to see McTavish, but he's up to Albuquerque. Come over and set down. You got some things to explain—you and the girl that died in your arms."

Regan grinned cheerfully. Leaving the astonished Herman to stare after them, they went to two of the chairs and dropped into them, and fell to talk.

"This here has got me buffaloed, Red," said the colonel, regarding his friend with frowning scrutiny. "What's it mean? Last I heard of you was after election."

Regan sobered. "That's about the last anybody has heard from me, I guess," he said, with a bitter twist to his lips.

"Come across," snapped the other curtly.

Regan got out his pocketbook and again produced the flower in paper.

"My gosh, you don't mean you really got tangled with a girl?" demanded Higgins.

"Nope." Regan took out the folded flower. "I was just sort of assuaging that female's curiosity. Just the same, this here is all I got left of my ranch and everything else. Reckon you know what it is?"

One look at the purplish-blue flower was enough for Higgins.

"Hm! Reckon so. Wooly loco, by gosh! What's it mean?"

"Started four months ago," said Regan, leaning back. "I got sick, but didn't know it, thought it was nothing much. For two weeks I was sort of light-headed. This here loco weed jumped up all over the ranch, real mysterious, and played hell with the stock; looked like the whole works was done for. Along come a gent and wanted to buy. Well, I was a plumb fool, that's all, only maybe the fever accounted for it a mite. I sold out to him and he gave me a check on a Chicago bank. Then he turned around and sold to somebody else and skipped. The check was no good, but I was slow in finding it out, coming down to bed with fever, The fever was scarlatina and got well, but I didn't. It went into my head and the doc sent me to St. Louis, and I had a mastoid operation and gosh knows what all besides. When I came to myself, I was broke—this gent had framed up the whole durned thing on me. I reckon he had even had the wooly loco planted out. There was a whole gang concerned in it, most likely. I went on to Chicago and could do nothing about the check except to sue the present owners, and

it's in the courts now and liable to stay there for the next ten years. I hated to come home and be laughed at, so I resigned the sheriff's job by wire from Chicago—"

Colonel Higgins broke into a storm of lusty oaths.

"You durned measly polecat!" he concluded wrathfully. "What the hell use are friends if you don't call 'em in? Why didn't you holler for me? Here you set whining—"

"I ain't whining," snapped Regan. "I'm on the prowl, by gosh!"

"And all the while I been roosting pretty up north and waiting for a county war to bust loose so's I could have some fun—and I might have been helping you out!" mourned Higgins. "You condemned lousy skunk, why didn't you wire me?"

"Fighting my own rats, thanks," said Regan. "I found that the cuss who trimmed me was supposed to be somewhere in New Mexico, and started out to find him, but had no money. So I got me a job with a tourist party wanting to see the sights, and here I am."

The colonel reached into his pocket and produced a plethoric wad of bills, from which he stripped a handful and thrust them at Regan.

"Take 'em, you condemned coyote! Shut up. I've bought me a big car and I'm driving home. You're comin' along."

"What for?" demanded Regan.

"Trouble." The colonel rolled a smoke and lighted it. "I've sort of got my back to the wall, up in them hills. There's a gang of measly scoundrels come in up there and swamped out the old-timers. I riz up once or twice and durned if they didn't soak the law on to me! They got a lawshark in Quartz City, and he's done plastered me with injunctions and things and bound me over to keep the peace and gosh knows what all. Judge Hart done slapped a thousand dollar fine on me last month for nothin' at all but beating the tar out of one of them tin-horns; he was right sorry to do it, too, but allowed the law made him. That's what we've come to up there. It's a hell of a country, these days!"

"Hm!" said Regan thoughtfully. "Seems kind of funny, you tangling with the law."

"It ain't funny It's plumb hell," said Colonel Higgins, with earnestness. "You see, up in Solaro County there ain't been a whole lot of law doings. Most of the ranches is back in the hills like mine, and Quartz City is a little one-hoss burg. The county's right poor—a few ranches and a whole passel of undeveloped mines. Me being well located and well known and having some money, I'm an easy mark for tin-horns. I can't run out in the hills and hide my head; I'm in the open for everybody to shoot at. Two of 'em is the mainsprings—feller named Cook, and another named Cal Victor."

"Sounds interesting," commented Regan. "Mean to say they're out to get you?"

"I reckon. They've done got the county in their pocket now. Cook come up last year and went slow and easy; he's a slick jasper, durned slick! Before anybody woke up he was setting back and running things. Victor showed up a month or two ago. He ain't so slick, only he tries to be, durn his yeller eyes! He's a bad man if I ever—"

"Whoa!" said Regan swiftly. "Did you say yellow eyes?"

"Plumb yeller, like a cat, and long and slanting, sleepy—regular danged cat—"

Regan was out of his chair in a flash.

"Go get your car," he snapped. "I'll see my boss and resign. Go quick! By glory, we can't head for Solaro County any too soon to suit me!"

"Holy hellcats!" exclaimed the colonel, staring. "What's hit you?"

"You have." Regan's blue eyes flashed. "Your friend Cal Victor has changed his name since he was down in Arizona, but he couldn't change those yellow eyes. He's my man."

Regan went for the swinging doors and disappeared. Colonel Higgins whistled softly.

"I'm damned!" he observed.

CHAPTER II

SOLARO COUNTY was not up and pushing. It was a little backwater county far from the railroad, and Quartz City reflected this, being a town of frame buildings and not of brick. The plaza was centered about the courthouse. One side was given over to stores—general, drug, hardware and a scattering of small shops. One side held the postoffice, title and trust company, and ramshackle wooden structure of professional offices, while the other two sides accommodated the hotel, more shops, and some dwellings. Out around this central plaza were plain houses, and not many of them at that.

The title and trust company was an ad-

junct of the bank, and in the bank Jed Cook held forth, occupying the large back room as an office. Cook had started as a lawyer in Quartz City, but now he was a little of everything, having brought a good deal of money into town and laid it out to advantage. He was a long, thin, white-faced man, with a face like a horse and gimlet eyes. He lived in a two-story house some distance away, but was more abroad than at home. His black-clad, lanky figure could often be found at the courthouse. His wife was a patient and long-suffering little woman, generally liked. Cook was generally liked also, and generally disliked as well. People said that he knew his way around.

He sat in his office on a morning at the end of April, and Cal Victor sat there with him.

"You were a danged fool to pull that deal down in Arizona," declared Cook. He always spoke slowly and carefully, as though watching every word that left his lips. "That man Regan can get the law on you if he ever runs you down."

"He ain't that kind," said Victor easily. "He'll want a personal settlement first, and he'll get it. Think I've forgot my tricks since the old days acrost the border? This is a good safe place. I'd ask nothing better than for him to show up and start something."

Cook nodded thoughtfully. "It's your funeral. Now, when's Colonel Higgins coming home?"

"Due pretty quick, I hear. You got them papers yet?"

"All cleaned up and ready for work."

Cook swung around. Hanging on the wall beside his desk was a large blue-print map of the county. Without rising, he pointed a finger to the extensive domain of the Two Bar H. The ranch of Colonel Higgins spread out across a portion of the valley, narrowed toward the upper end, and ran off into several canyons along the hills.

"You're a silent sort of devil," said Cal Victor, not without admiration. "You say you're all ready for work—but what at?"

"Eagletail Canyon," said Cook, and put a cigar between his teeth. Victor whistled, and regarded the map.

"Eagletail Canyon was there marked as part of the Two Bar H. It was a fairly large canyon with a wide lower flat of a mile across and two miles long, the upper portion being long and narrow and running up into a maze of peaks. A good-sized stream was marked on it, this stream continuing and forming the main water supply of the ranch, running on past the buildings and into the main Rio Solaro farther on.

On the map Eagletail Canyon did not amount to much in comparison with the whole estate of Colonel Higgins—from an amateur's viewpoint. Regarded with the gimlet eyes of Jed Cook, however, it was the key to a fortune.

"Hm!" said Victor, frowning. "I don't get the point. Looks like you're trying to bite off a chunk of something, Jed."

COOK drew a sheaf of papers under his hand.

"I've done my end of it—now it's your job," he said quietly. "Here are the papers, all legal and aboveboard. You've filed the homestead on the upper flat of the canyon and part of the lower, and your man Vaca has filed on the rest. Between the two of you, the whole canyon is yours, provided you prove up later on."

Victor's mouth flew open for an instant, and his yellow eyes widened.

"My gosh!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you pick out Kansas City to file on? Nothing small about you, is there? I s'pose you got some reason behind it."

"Some," said the other dryly, and regarded his partner. "Hm! Guess you can handle it."

Victor was capable in looks, if not prepossessing. His face was lean and brown and hard as flint. He was partly bald, and his bald spot was as brown as his face. He had a thin slit of a mouth, thin nostrils, high cheek-bones and a sleepy, cattish air as though he were too lazy to take much interest in life. When those yellow eyes opened up, however, they could hold a cruel and predatory expression startling to see.

"It's like this," said Jed Cook slowly. "You and Vaca have a scheme on. You're going to throw a dam across the upper flat, where the narrowest place comes; the high walls on each side will make it an easy job. You and Vaca and half a dozen greasers can do it easy, laying a spillway first and building up over it. Rock's handy—all you need is cement. I got two mule teams ready to start out in the morning with the cement."

"Thanks," said Victor, with a dazed air. "Thanks. I'm an engineer, am I? Good gosh! How in hell d'you expect me to build a dam?"

JED COOK almost smiled, but not quite. He had never really smiled.

"I expect you to work like hell at it, anyhow," he said. "It's your own job, savvy? I don't show in it a-tall."

"Look here," exclaimed Victor, "does Higgins know about it?"

"Not yet, but he will. I've done the filing and everything very carefully, in order to avoid trouble before you get landed and get to work."

"Well, you're a wonder," said the other thoughtfully, rolling a cigarette as he talked, "but I'm ding-danged if I can see how you can grab off part of a man's land by filing on it!"

"Like this," explained Jed Cook. "The colonel has legal title to most of his range, and I couldn't touch it. On Eagletail Canyon it's different. He filed entry on it twenty-odd years ago, with some of his friends—homesteaded it, savvy? But he never proved up, and it's lapsed long ago. Nobody knows it, and he's forgotten it, since it's always been part of the Two Bar H. Took me quite a bit to unearth it, but I ran it down and now it's cinched."

"Hm!" Victor licked his cigarette, pinched it, and lighted it. "Higgins will sure start to raise hell."

A thin curve showed in the lips of Jed Cook, being what passed for a smile with him, holding no mirth whatever but a silent and deadly contempt.

"Let him. He's under bond, isn't he? Just let him start, and see how quick I'll clap the law on him! He knows it, too."

"But looky here, Jed!" Victor leaned forward and pointed his cigarette at the map on the wall. "I got to know what I'm building a wall for, don't I?"

"Sure. You're going to make a dam. This dam is going to back up the water and fill the upper canyon, or at least the upper half of the upper flat. It'll make a lake. You and Vaca are partners, savvy? You're going to irrigate the remainder of it and raise vegetables and fruit and gosh knows what all. Anything you can think of. Alfalfa, if you like. I ain't particular."

Victor looked startled. "You ain't, for a fact," he observed. "Neither am I, but I never thought I'd be a blasted farmer! What about the Two Bar H? Seems to me, that crick is their main source of water supply, at least for the home ranch and the range in between."

"That ain't our funeral, is it?" said Jed Cook, regarding him steadily.

"Oh!" Victor sucked in his breath, and his yellow eyes blazed suddenly. "Oh! My gosh, Jed! You aim to cut 'em off complete?"

"Complete." Cook nodded slightly. "We'll force out that fool Higgins. With summer ahead, and no water, he'll be up against it. Meantime, I'll get a friend to come along and make him an offer for the ranch—before the summer's over, it'll be in my hands, you'll see! Then you can quit being a farmer and we'll set in to make money. You got enough to make it a good partnership proposition."

"Cleaned up ten thousand on the deal down South," said Victor. "Suit you?"

"Gimme the check."

Victor sucked his cigarette, doubtfully.

"Sure it's safe."

"Safe as butter, you bet. Now or never if you want to go in as partner. Otherwise, it's a foreman's job."

Victor looked at the inflexible horse-face of the other man and decided.

"Right," he said. "I'll give you the check in an hour, Jed. So I got to start in the morning, have I?"

"Yes. The mule teams are over to the livery, waiting—all in your name, savvy? You show up and start 'em off this afternoon. A truck couldn't get up the Eagletail Canyon, with that adobe mud up above the lower flat and no road. You start off the teams, then catch up in the morning and get 'em on the spot."

"S'pose them Two-Bar H punchers try to stop me?"

"Show your papers. If they still try, then shoot. You're in your rights."

"Suits me." Victor grinned wolfishly. "Looks like you got 'em hog-tied, Jed."

"I've got 'em squaw-hitched, that's what!" and Cook's voice rasped. "This afternoon, you and me stage a quarrel, see? Let the whole town know we've fallen out and quit. When Higgins gets back, you clap him under bonds to keep the peace same's I done. We're setting pretty!"

"I'll say we are!" said Victor admiringly.

CHAPTER III

MR. REGAN of Arizona arrived in Quartz City on the afternoon of the same day Mr. Cal Victor departed. Mr. Regan did not come in Colonel Higgins' big car. He came by stage, and when he

met Colonel Higgins in the street the two gentlemen exchanged a blank look and passed by like utter strangers.

"Can't be too careful, Red, with that skunk Cook," had said the brass-voiced colonel. "If you go along as a friend o' mine, they'll likely sick the law on to you likewise. I got a hunch there's some deviltry bein' cooked up, so the best thing for us to do is to play like we're strangers. You go in on the stage from Zion and I'll see you in town."

So said, so done.

Mr. Regan went to the Paradise Hotel with his suitcase, and changed his identity. He could not very well change his front name—he was too obviously "Red" wherever he went—but for the moment he became Mr. Potter of Santa Fe. Having so become, he sauntered forth to get acquainted.

This was not a hard matter, for everybody was interested in strangers, and plenty of people were in town, it being a Saturday. Numerous cars were on hand from the lower valley, but Solaro County was by no means progressive as regarded its outlying portions. Burros were plentiful, both in pairs with a bearded prospector behind, and in files with loads of firewood from the hills and a swarthy native goading them on. Cow ponies were scarce. The only big range left was that of the Two Bar H, the lower valley being cut up among stock farmers. Plenty of ordinary horseflesh lined the hitching rails, but Mr. Potter looked in vain for any top-hands, either human or animal. The open range was gone, and with it was gone the best of its breed, apparently.

Sauntering across the plaza, Mr. Potter dropped upon a bench near the war monument and applied himself to the manufacture of a smoke. Two other men sat on the same bench, which was a long one. They glanced at the newcomer, found him staring up dreamily at the sky, and went on with their talk.

"Well, what's the answer?" said one. "What's this Cal Victor doin' with two big strings o' burros, hey? Couldn't see what the load was—looked like sacks. Headin' up northeast."

"Search me," responded the other. "But you keep out'n his way. He's bad, that hombre, and he packs a gun. Me, I don't like him. I hear tell him and Jed Cook done had a fallin' out yesterday, in public. Cussed each other up an' down. Cook, he's a comer."

"He's a cold-blooded fish, that's what he is," said the first. "This Victor gent is sure interested in the Wartman gal, too. She and her ma's in town today, huh?"

The other grunted assent. "So's Vaca. That durned snake ain't no native—he's pure greaser from down below. Knife-thrower, they tell me. Well, let's mosey."

They departed. Mr. Potter smoked thoughtfully and ruminated on what he had learned. He was not sure what to make of the reported split between Victor and Jed Cook, so he decided to go and have a look at said Cook.

He lounged over to the bank, inquired for Cook, and was sent on to the back room. Here he found himself met by the gimlet eyes and long face, and knew without further parley he had found a man who caused him active dislike.

"What can I do for you?" asked Cook harshly.

"Why, I met a feller down to Zion," said Mr. Potter, "and he said I'd better see you, you bein' the big man around here. I was sort of looking around for a job, being a stranger in these parts."

"I ain't any employment agency," said Cook. "What kind of a job?"

"Most any kind. I'm right handy with stock, and can do anything in reason."

"Hm!" said Cook, inspecting him. "Where you from?"

"Santa Fe." Mr. Potter put on his most innocent air. "I been working around there a couple o' years. Come out from Kansas City for my health."

"H'm! You don't look like a lunger now," was the response. "Know anything about mixing cement?"

"I was a builders' laborer for a couple of years, back East," said Mr. Potter, without hesitation. "But there's no call for it in these parts."

"Man's been trying to get hold of someone who knew about it," said Cook. "But my recommend wouldn't land you the job—we've had a falling out. You might go see him. He ain't likely to have hired anybody."

"Thanks, thanks a whole lot," said Mr. Potter earnestly. "Where'll I find him?"

"I dunno. Last I heard, he had filed on somebody's unproved homestead, up in the Eagletail Canyon," replied Cook cautiously. "He was going to build him something

there. Name is Cal Victor. Look him up and you may strike something. Don't mention it. So long."

MR. POTTER drifted on his way, heading aimlessly along the street.

"Now we've struck pay dirt," he reflected to himself, with considerable satisfaction. "So Victor has taken two burro trains out to Eagletail Canyon wherever that is, and they're loaded with cement! What in purgatory is he going to do with cement? Nobody is shouting any answer, I reckon. Victor sure wouldn't give me any job, either—the minute we come face to face, something's going to happen. Hm!"

Mr. Potter approached the general store, before which was hitched a buckboard. A large and determined-looking woman sat in the buckboard, and Mr. Potter surveyed her with approval—not of her beauty, but of her general womanly air. She observed his fixed regard, and a smile touched her eyes. Mr. Potter promptly stepped out to the rack, and removed his hat.

"Can you, ma'am?" he asked.

"Can I what?" she demanded with some asperity, losing her smile.

"Why, can you cook real doughnuts that ain't leather?" demanded Mr. Potter. "Minute I seen you, I says to myself, I bet she can!"

The lady smiled, once more, as she met his dancing eyes.

"What's the idea, young man? You trying to get fresh?"

"No, ma'am. I'm a stranger in these parts, and I just got a hankering for doughnuts."

"Huh! You don't look drunk," she returned, eyeing him keenly. Suddenly she turned, looked around, and her face darkened. "Consarn that greaser—if he tries—"

Mr. Potter turned also, and surveyed the store-front. Beside it was lounging a very swarthy and very hard-jawed man, who might have been either a native or a Mexican—Mr. Potter sensed he was the latter. His dress was rough and inconspicuous, and was not the moving-picture director's idea of costume at all. The only picturesque touch about it was the pair of large and jingling silver spurs on the boot-heels.

From the store stepped a girl who instantly captured the entire attention of Mr. Potter. She had the fresh pink bloom of a desert rose, she looked entirely capable of taking care of herself, and in her gray eyes was a certain sparkle which made Mr. Potter's heart very unstable, as their glances met. She had both arms filled with bundles.

"Buenos dias, senorita!" The Mexican swept off his battered Stetson and bowed, and in his left hand extended an envelope to the girl. "My friend Senor Victor ask me to give you thees, if I see you today—"

"You can keep your letters, and your Senor Victor too," exclaimed the girl angrily. "If I had a free hand, I'd give you something to remember me by! Get out of the way!"

"But, senorita!" protested the other. "Here my friend and me, we shall be neighbors soon—we are neighbors already! Thees—"

"Get out of the way!" snapped the girl. "And don't you speak to me again!"

"Ay di mi! But one moment, senorita—"

Five long, firm objects took hold of the speaker by the back of the neck, and held him immovable. Those fingers were merciless. Over the stooped figure, Mr. Potter looked at the girl, and grinned cheerfully.

"You've done told him twice to get out the way, ma'am, so now I reckon he'll get." With this, Mr. Potter addressed the squirming Mexican in his own tongue. "Now, you several kinds of a pig, you and your friend Mr. Victor will remember to obey the lady after this, maybe!"

He jerked his victim erect, shook him back and forth, and kicked him violently. Then he applied the other hand to the gentleman's rear, lifted him, swung him all asprawl, and on the second swing sent him hurtling out across the hitch-rack to land on all fours in the dust. Mr. Potter strolled forward to the rack, leaned on it, and watched the Mexican with interest as the man struggled to his feet.

FOR a moment the swarthy face snarled with fury, and the man's hand slipped to his shirt.

"Try it," said Mr. Potter gladly. "Try it!"

The Mexican thought better of it, and picking up his hat, departed hastily. Mr. Potter turned and encountered the keen gaze of the lady on the buckboard.

"My land!" she exclaimed. "You sure are a fast worker, young man!"

"Thank you," he returned. A voice at his elbow put in.

"And thank you—very much indeed!"

He found himself looking into the gray eyes of the girl, and was somewhat con-

fused. A crowd had collected, moreover, and he was the center of interest. On the outskirts of this crowd was Colonel Higgins, making violent and peremptory signals, and Mr. Potter ignored them.

"You're more than welcome, miss," he said cheerfully, and glanced around. "Will any gent here introduce me? No? Then, ma'am, this here red-headed gent is named Potter, and he'll throw a greaser out of your way any time you want, and glad to do it."

There was a little growl in the crowd. Somebody spoke up.

"We don't like greaser talk here, Potter."

Mr. Potter's blue eyes hardened a little as they swept the circle of faces.

"Oh, is that so!" he said quietly. "Gents, I didn't go to offend any native. I'm not a tourist, and I know just exactly what I'm saying. I said I'd be glad to throw a greaser out of this lady's way any time, and I stick to it. I'm not talking about natives—I'm talking about greasers. Savvy that? I know a Mex when I see him."

The crowd was instantly appeased, the numerous natives among it—who considered themselves quite as good Americans as anyone else, and with reason—finding him entirely in the right. The lady sitting on the buckboard chuckled.

"Well, Potter, I'm Mrs. Wartman and this here is my girl, Peggy. Any time you want them fried cakes, you come out to our shack."

"I'll come tomorrow," said Potter at once. He took the bundles from the girl and put them in the box under the seat of the buckboard. "Where shall I come?"

"Wartman canyon, first one north of Eagletail," said the lady. "If you come tomorrow, you fetch a bucket o' lard, because we don't use it much and fried cakes ought to have real fresh lard, not drippin's."

"We'll be there, ma'am," said Potter, and doffed his hat with a flourish.

Mrs. Wartman drove off at once. Potter grinned at the crowd, then ambled along in the trail of Colonel Higgins, who strolled down to the corner of the plaza and turned off. Potter reached the corner in time to see the colonel enter a shoe repair shop, and he lost no time in following. Stepping in, he found himself alone with Higgins and a bald-headed, spectacled cobbler in a leather apron.

"So here you are!" said the colonel, glaring. "Pete, shake hands with Red Regan of Arizona. Red, this is my old friend, Pete Ashley."

"Glad to meet you," said Mr. Potter, shaking hands. "Only my name ain't Regan. It's Potter, from Santa Fe. I think I got me a job with Cal Victor, only I don't aim to show up and claim it."

"What's that?" demanded Higgins abruptly. "With Victor?"

"Yep." Mr. Potter grinned. "He wants a man who can mix cement. He's done taken two burro trains of cement up to a place of his in Eagletail Canyon, wherever that is—"

Colonel Higgins exploded. In between oaths, the astonished Potter comprehended that Higgins had heard various and sundry rumors about Victor's two burro outfits. Then that cobbler cut in shrilly and vociferously, shaking his fist at the colonel.

"I told ye!" exclaimed Pete Ashley. "Ain't I told ye, day ye left town, about them there homestead filin's? Now they've cut in on ye, dog-gone your fool hide! I'll bet a dollar they done grabbed the hull canyon off'n ye!"

COLONEL HIGGINS exploded again.

"What's all the close harmony about?" asked Mr. Potter curiously. "You and Pete are particular friends, I guess?"

"He's my old foreman," said Colonel Higgins, when he had somewhat calmed down. In hot and sulphurous words, he managed to inform Mr. Potter just what the Eagletail Canyon means to the Two Bar H Ranch.

"Now," he went on, "something's doing up yonder. I dunno what it is, but I aim to find out pronto! You sure were right about the filin' on that land, Pete—I remembered afterwards it had never been proved up and had probably lapsed. But what the dingle-dangled hell! It's always been part of my range!"

"It ain't now, and I done told you so," chirped Pete Ashley, bobbing his head. "What's more, I hear he took them burros out over your own road—the one branches off from your road to Wartman Canyon."

Colonel Higgins gulped. "And I warned the boys not to start any trouble on any excuse!" he said mournfully. "So they wouldn't have stopped him. The burros started yesterday, I hear, and he's out there by now, most likely. Yes, sir, if they've done hooked me on that there canyon, what

can I do? Not one blasted thing except shoot, and the law—"

"But this Victor," suggested Mr. Potter, "appears to have had a row yesterday with the estimable Jed Cook!"

"So I heard," began the colonel dubiously, when Pete Ashley spat out an abrupt word.

"Bosh! Waggletail! Hen's feathers! If them two jaspers had a real fuss, would it end with cuss-words—or begin there either one? Not on your life! Jed Cook was real mad— and who ever heard of him losin' his temper before, and in public? Listen here! That there row was all a bluff—you better believe me! Them two are pulling the same stuff you and Red Regan here are pulling—only nobody's wise to you, and I'm wise to them."

There was a moment of silence.

"Well, what you figger on doing?" demanded Mr. Potter.

"Blasted if I know!" growled the perplexed Higgins. "Looks like they got me by the short hair. If I start trouble, they'll jump me sure's fate. I got to find out for certain whether this Victor has really filed on the land or not."

"S'pose you do it, then," said Mr. Potter. "I'll likely drop in at the ranch sometime tomorrow—"

"Not much! You're going out with me here and now," exclaimed the colonel. "This is too big for us to go blind in, and I'll maybe need you around—"

"I got other business on hand," said Mr. Potter coolly, and rolled a smoke with expert fingers. "I got a date for tomorrow about noon time, you bet."

The current of Colonel Higgins' thoughts were abruptly shifted.

"Oh!" he said, staring. "You and that Wartman gal, huh? Dog-gone the women! She's been the ruination of half my outfit—mooning around the place and letting work slide. Don't know who it was you dumped out in the road? It was Hernan Vaca, the right-hand partner of this here Victor."

"So that was the gent, huh?" Mr. Potter nodded and lighted his cigarette. "Where's her dad?"

"Dead two years, and the widder's holding down the place."

"I may lend her a hand, then, if her doughnuts are as good as she looks," said Mr. Potter thoughtfully. "Suppose you go sort of easy until you and me have a conference—maybe I can ferret things out. So long as I don't meet up with Victor personally, I got a chance to work. Suit you?"

"All right," agreed Higgins. "And if you need anything or anyone, you come to Pete Ashley, savvy? He got crippled up and quit range work, but boy, he's there!"

"I believe it," and Mr. Potter grinned at the bald-headed cobbler. "So long, Pete. See you later. And don't cuss too much, Higgins—it don't help the digestion."

With which he departed.

CHAPTER IV

COLONEL HIGGINS, who had gone on home the previous night, had at once sent back by one of his boys a gift, left at the hotel for Mr. Potter. It consisted of one very good horse, accompanied by a bill of sale properly made out in the right name, and outfit to match. The puncher who brought it, knew only he was delivering an animal contracted for. He left it for Potter, got the mail, and went home. Mr. Potter discovered it an hour later, having slept longer than usual this morning.

He blessed the colonel's forethought, and emptied his grip into the slicker already tied behind the saddle, and with a lunch put up, made ready for the road. He had assiduously studied the geography of Solaro County the previous night, and knew exactly what he was about. Then, at the last moment, he remembered the bucket of lard.

He bought it.

Now, a lard bucket, filled with lard, is not the easiest thing in the world to pack. The day promised heat in plenty, and Mr. Potter had no intention of packing the thing inside his slicker and spare socks. Nor did he intend to carry it in his arms. He compromised by tying it firmly to the rear set of straps on the off side of the saddle, and mounted. To this, the Two Bar H cayuse promptly objected. The bucket was well wrapped in paper, and the paper rustled, and the weight was disconcerting. Hence the objections.

Mr. Potter had mounted before the objections began, and knowing himself in the right, with the bucket firmly tied against the saddle, he stayed mounted. Quartz City enjoyed itself en masse. At the height of the celebration, Mr. Potter perceived the white horse-face of Jed Cook in the crowd, so he managed to let the bill of sale leave his pocket and swirl away, to be picked up and read and passed back to him. When the objections were over-ruled, he used some

extremely hard language concerning the sort of horse sold him by Colonel Higgins; then, convinced he had done a good morning's work, he rode out to the north.

"Li'l old lard bucket, you done played me a good turn after all," he observed, and gave the offending article a pat. "Now Jed Cook knows—or thinks he knows—how come I got this hoss, and what I think of the colonel. Let's see; how much of me is left? All present, I guess. Gun, correct; money, what there is; tobacco—yep. Git along, little dogies!"

Having a twenty-mile ride ahead of him, and no intention of reaching the Wartman place in time for dinner—since he might as well put in the afternoon helping to fry doughnuts, instead of being in a hurry—Mr. Potter ambled along gaily, in a deceptively innocent and carefree manner. He had scattered broad hints in town that he was leaving to seek a job to which Jed Cook had directed him, so the past and present did not worry him. The future did, however.

To be of value to Colonel Higgins, and incidentally to himself, his real identity must remain submerged. The moment he met Cal Victor face to face, he would either have to shoot first or lose his value—and he did not want to accept either alternative. He was in to play the game of Higgins as well as his own, which meant to see things through with Jed Cook. And he was loath to shoot Victor under any provocation, at least until he got his money back, or some large portion of it.

Momentarily he had quite forgotten about Hernan Vaca.

"Now, Mr. Potter, get that red head of yours to work!" he reflected, as he jogged along past the domains of the stock farmers toward the larger range of the upper valley. "If you follow natural impulses, this here Victor will die sudden, and you'll still be broke, which will do no good whatever.

"If you get the law on him, as you can, the lawyers will trim you—and Jed Cook will likely back him up, besides. The best thing you can do is to lay low, or as low as possible, and wait for what turns up. Ain't it so? Agreed. Unanimous. Your interest depends on it, and so does that of old Tom Higgins, so don't go to following impulse, cowboy! You take that there cayuse into the corral, and rope out old bronc Caution."

It must be confessed that this advice did not proceed from disinterested and wholly unselfish motives; not in the least. Mr. Potter, as far as he himself was concerned, did not lose very much sleep over being broke. Since the previous day, however, he had suddenly realized that such a condition might be a tragedy. More than one puncher had thought the same thing, after looking into those gray eyes of Peggy Wartman's.

So, concluded Mr. Potter, he must bend his efforts to making Cal Victor disgorge, rather than to punishment. It would be better to have even five thousand dollars in hand, than the gentleman in the penitentiary.

"I'd a heap rather have Victor to handle than this Jed Cook," reflected Mr. Potter, "I sure feel sorry for poor Higgins—looks like he's up against it, and dassn't move. If he make a row, he gets plastered by the law, and if he don't, he gets his water supply cut off and has to pay through the nose. Well, thank the Lord I ain't tied down! Worst of it is, this Cook is a town crook, a regular law shark. He sets behind a desk and lets other folks, like this here Victor, do the rough stuff. Well, I've known a heap of men who could throw a hell of a big front behind a desk, and get 'em out where the fur's flying, they ain't so much."

WITH this comforting reflection, he chirruped to the cayuse and proceeded to roll a smoke.

Noon drew on, and found him approaching Rio Solaro, a tiny river spanning the road with its accompanying wealth of greenery. Here he stopped, not troubling the ranch a few hundred yards distant, and made his noonday meal. Two miles farther on, he would come to the Two Bar H territory, and the road leading off westward to the ranch of Higgins. Then he would have only six miles left to Wartman canyon.

Presently he mounted again and rode on. The day was hot, little short of blistering, and he congratulated himself on having put that lard where it was; so far, however, it did not appear to have melted and run. Mr. Potter finally came to new fencing and a sign informing him that this was the Two Bar H range, Colonel Tom Higgins, owner. Some distance ahead, the ranch road turned out of the highway, running off to the left and following the winding course of a creek whose trees screened the northern approach. The ranch buildings were still several miles distant, toward the rolling hills which mounted into peaks beyond.

Mr. Potter had nearly reached the highway, which made a sharp turn just past the

creek and trees, when around the bend toward him rode two mounted men. One was a white man, of a decidedly hard-eyed appearance, and the other was apparently a native—but Mr. Potter knew better at the first glance. Half a dozen little things, the very manner of riding, told him otherwise. And the face, crossed by a diagonal knife-scar, was beyond mistake.

Promptly, Mr. Potter forgot all his good resolutions. He had an excellent memory, and the moment he saw the knife-scarred face, he remembered a poster hanging in the office of Sheriff Red Regan, and the stimulating mention of two thousand dollars reward for said face, whether in action or inanimate. No longer being Sheriff Regan, Mr. Potter should have minded his own business and gone his way, but he did not. He was broke, and had reasons for wanting to be otherwise. So he drew rein and waited.

The two approached, with sharp looks at man and horse, and would have separated to go on either side, but Mr. Potter, with excessive politeness, frustrated the maneuver by wheeling his horse to the roadside. He smiled genially, with a cheery greeting.

"Howdy, gents! If this here is a sample of your spring weather, what's summer like, huh? Potter's my name. Lookin' me up a job in your country."

"Howdy," returned the ruffianly white man. "Glad to meet yuh. I'm Chuck Hoskins—got me a ranch in the hills up north. This here is Miguel Gomez, workin' for me. Goin' far?"

"Aiming to meet a feller in Eagletail canyon, wherever that is," said Mr. Potter. He noted that the flitting gaze of the Mexican went to Chuck Hoskins, and knew that his prey was strange to this country—did not know where the Eagletail lay.

"Foller this road," said Mr. Hoskins, pointing to the side trail. "Where it goes off to the Two Bar H, don't foller, but keep going, right along the crick. Keep to the crick, and it'll lead you plumb into the canyon."

"Much obliged," said Mr. Potter, and tossed away his cigarette. "By the way, who's the sheriff in this county?"

"Bob Stevens," said Mr. Hoskins, his gaze narrowing slightly. "He ain't on the way, I hope?"

"Rest easy," returned Mr. Potter. "You might drop into his office, if you will, and tell him to come along out here."

"What for?" demanded Chuch Hoskins.

"Why, to have a little talk with the two of us."

"What two? Me?"

"No, no," said Mr. Potter. "Me and Miguel, here. Miguel is going to stay with me a spell, until you send out Sheriff Stevens."

"Huh?"

CHUCK HOSKINS looked blank, but not so the Mexican, who was now watching Mr. Potter very sharply. One swarthy hand was moving, inch by inch, but Mr. Potter ignored it.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "That's the best way. Miguel, you stay here and talk with me. I want to ask you about a little incident down on the border last October. Maybe you've forgotten about it. You remember that ranch where the white woman was, huh?"

"Are you drunk or plain crazy?" demanded Mr. Hoskins, with rising wrath. "What you driving at, anyhow? Miguel ain't been near the border in two years—he's been right here helpin' me clear off brush and get me a shack built!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Potter, and his blue eyes opened widely. "Really, now? Then, of course—"

"Yes, really," snapped Mr. Hoskins. "And I'd like to know why in time you want to run your durned nose into other folks' business!"

"Then I'll tell you," said Mr. Potter. All of a sudden, he no longer looked genial or innocent; instead, his blue eyes were abruptly dangerous. "Hoskins, when a man like you throws in with a woman murderer like this halfbreed varmint, it means bad luck. You ride into town and send out the sheriff, or you'll have bad luck."

"Do your own sending," growled Hoskins, and moved on his horse as though to ride away toward town.

He was nearly past Mr. Potter, when, like a flash, he moved. At the same instant, Miguel Gomez sent his hand darting upward.

Mr. Potter dug in his spurs, and his cayuse went six feet away in one jump. Reining in hard, Mr. Potter leaned over in the saddle. Several explosions had sounded on the afternoon air, and now two more sounded, short and sharp.

The Two Bar H cayuse objected strenuously to all these fireworks. When he decided to quit objections, he quit. Mr. Potter

surveyed the scene. Miguel Gomez lay in the road, dead. His horse was careening on toward town. Mr. Chuck Hoskins was also in the road, grimly hanging to the bridle of his plunging horse, and apparently somewhat hurt. Mr. Potter dismounted and came to his aid, and quieted the horse. He stood looking down at Hoskins, whose left arm hung limp from the shoulder.

"Get in the saddle and get on to town," he said crisply, "and send out the sheriff like I told you. Think up a durned good lie to account for your friendship with this snake, and you'll get past. I got nothing against you, so far."

"Who in hell are you?" demanded the groaning Hoskins, who had lost all his truculence.

"Red Potter, like I said. Get along."

Looking very unhappy, Hoskins managed to drag aboard his mount, and went away from there.

Mr. Potter sat down and rolled another cigarette, and presently fumbled in his pockets. He brought out a pencil and an old envelope, from which he carefully deleted the name and address of Sheriff Regan. On the inside of the envelope he set forth a message, briefly but explicitly. Then he rose and knelt above the figure of Miguel Gomez, who was neatly drilled between the eyes, and turned his figure on its back. He pinned the message to the dead man's shirt, so it showed plainly to all the world, then straightened up and looked at it. The writing was very legible:

"SHERIFF STEVENS

"Please collect the $2000 reward offered by State of Arizona for apprehension of Gonzales Renado, dead or alive, for murdering rancher and woman in Cochise County in October of last year. Hold reward for me. I'll come to claim it.

Red Potter."

Mr. Potter shoved back his hat and reflectively scratched his red hair.

"If it hadn't been for the woman," he observed, "I dunno but what I'd have let the cuss go—I don't exactly like the idea of going after reward money. Still and all, it ain't such a bad job, considering what a durned poor shot I am! Reckon I'd ought to be right thankful these two skunks were worse shots yet. Never even touched me—huh!"

Returning to his horse, Mr. Potter mounted and headed the animal toward the branch road. No matter who found the body, it was sure to go to the sheriff with the message, and word of that message would spread far and wide. The two thousand dollars was as good as in the bank, or better.

Mr. Potter lifted up his voice and sang:

"Oh, Jackie was a gambling man,
And he lived up to the name,
For the last words that poor Jackie said
Was: 'High, low, jack and the game!'
He shorely was her man,
But he done her wrong!"

Mr. Potter did not know there was a neat little clipped hole at the rear brim of his hat. There was something else he did not know, either—he had never thought to look at the package strapped to his saddle.

So he rode on, in high contentment with the world.

CHAPTER V

WARTMAN CANYON was really a canoncito—a little niche among the hills watered by a spring. The spring was so tiny as to be practically useless unless Wartman had discovered it, finding that it never ceased its steady flow all the year around. Now Wartman was gone, but the spring flowed endlessly. From somewhere up in the high hills beyond, came this little spring, set thus by nature to serve its purpose.

And it served well, guided and applied as it was by Wartman's determined widow. Even in winter it was never very cold here—the ground was never frozen. Beside the spring, on the north hillside halfway up the canyon, stood the shack Wartman had built for his family. He had builded sturdily, not being a fly-by-night nester, and the shack was mute notice to all the world that the Wartmans were here to stay, and had seized on this nook forever. Built thickly of adobes it was, since adobe clay lay everywhere for the taking and the sun was hot; six-foot walls, deeply recessed windows, and a wide gallery on three sides with long carven vigas in the New Mexican style, all gave the place an air of coolness and comfort which was not belied by the interior, with its little patio. Behind was another adobe shed for the two horses and the milch cow which made up the Wartman stock.

Mr. Potter took in all this as he rode along. He observed, too, that small as it was, this property had been made a valuable one. The entire flat of the canyon was plotted out in vegetables, while a few fruit trees grew sturdily. From the spring ran down a

main acequia, and this ended in nothing—every inch of the water was carefully devoted to promoting the best interests of the growing crops. Since the Quartz City market must be an excellent one for all green produce, Mrs. Wartman evidently had a very comfortable income.

The lady herself was working over the acequia, and came to the shed as Mr. Potter arrived. Her daughter appeared from the house and joined them.

"I never did know calico was so becoming!" exclaimed Mr. Potter, as he shook hands, and his blue eyes were dancing. "My, but you folks look home-like and easy on the eyes! I'm right glad I got a shave this morning. How about doughnuts?"

"Well," said Mrs. Wartman, surveying him with a twinkle, "I s'pose if it's important enough, we can drop all our farm work and so forth, and fry you up a batch. I don't know but what they'd taste good, myself! That is, if you ain't forgot the lard. Who's been chewing your hat? It was a good hat yesterday, as I remember it."

"Huh?" Mr. Potter withdrew his gaze long enough from the gray eyes of Peggy to look down at the hat in his hands. He observed the neatly clipped hole in the rim. "Good gosh! And I blamed 'em for being poor shots—"

"Who?" demanded the lady swiftly. Mr. Potter recollected himself, and met her frown with a most innocent expression.

"Who? Why, two fellers I met in the road this morning. They got talking, and so did I, and we had quite an argument about old-fashioned revolvers being better than automatic pistols, and so we bet a dollar a shot on three shots. They set my hat up and one of 'em cracked at it, and I took a crack at one of their hats. I done collected three dollars off 'em, too—none of us noticed this little clip in the brim. Now," added Mr. Potter thoughtfully, "I reckon I'll have to find them fellers again and hand back a dollar, to be right honest."

Mrs. Wartman regarded him fixedly. Before she could speak, an exclamation broke from Peggy.

"Why—whatever's the matter with your poor horse?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Potter, and turned. Then he swallowed hard. The whole barrel of the cayuse was streaked with dark grease. "Oh, lord!" he groaned. "I reckon that lard must have melted and the cover come off, and I told the feller to tie it careful, too!"

"Hm!" said Mrs. Wartman grimly. She went to the greasy pocket and untied the thongs, then stripped the paper from the bucket of lard. There stood revealed a neat round hole passing through the top of the bucket. Mrs. Wartman followed up her quest, and put her finger on a spot in the saddle.

"There it is," she said. "Howcome? I s'pose you were using the hosses for a target, too?"

"Of course not," returned Mr. Potter virtuously. "This is the strangest thing ever, ma'am! I could swear the bucket didn't have any hole in it—how about the lard?"

"Half of it's left. Plenty, I reckon." Mrs. Wartman eyed him in a disconcerting manner. "Let's see them three dollars you collected."

Mr. Potter was up against it, having only the roll of his bills given him by Higgins.

"Well, it's right funny about them dollars," he returned easily. "You see, ma'am—"

"It's all right," she broke in brusquely. "Don't tax your brains too far, now; standing bareheaded in the sun does have that effect at times. I expect you could make up a wonderful good story about how come that bullet in your saddle, but you don't need to. You set your hoss to rest, and if you want to spin any more fairy-tales, do it to Peggy. She's used to it. All the boys in the county fill her up with fairy-tales. But when you come into my house, young man, you come clean! Understand?"

"Yes'm," said Mr. Potter meekly.

HE TURNED and followed the lady with his gaze, as she went to the house, and then he looked around to meet the laughing gray eyes of Peggy. He grinned.

"You'll have to tell her sooner or later," observed the girl. Suddenly anxiety came into her eyes. "It wasn't Vaca? Not the Mexican you threw into the road yesterday?"

Mr. Potter shook his head. "Nope; to tell the truth, it was an accident."

"Oh!" She became cool. "Let's get your horse unsaddled, unless you want to leave him—"

"Thanks, we'll put him up," said Mr. Potter eagerly. "I don't guess he'd want to wait while we got them doughnuts going, would he?"

Truth to tell, Mr. Potter did not at all desire to inform Peggy Wartman that he had just killed a man on the highway.

When the cayuse was somewhat wiped

down and deposited in a stall, a new and fearful experience this time of year, Mr. Potter and the girl sought the house. He insisted on following his guide straight to the kitchen, explaining that a parlor made him feel uncomfortable. Mrs. Wartman was already making preparations for the fray. She looked capable and cheerful.

"I s'pose it ain't so hot here this time of year," she observed, "as it is down in Arizona?"

"Why, I reckon not," said Mr. Potter. "Me, I'm from Santa Fe, so I can't rightly tell."

"I s'pose you know Sheriff Watson, who has the garage by the bridge there?"

"Yes'm," said Mr. Potter guardedly. "That is to say, not professionally, but personally."

"Has his blind eye got any better?"

Now, Mr. Potter had heard of Sheriff Watson, but had never heard of any eye.

"Not much," he responded. "He's still doctoring."

"Oh!" said the lady. Peggy seemed very much amused over something, and Mr. Potter grew rather red. "Peggy, get me a bucket o' fresh water from the spring."

Mr. Potter volunteered his services, and was sternly told to set still. When the girl had departed, Mrs. Wartman swung around and surveyed him.

"Well?" she demanded. "How about them bullets? Was it Vaca?"

"No, ma'am, it wasn't," blurted out the badgered visitor, desperately. "It was a feller named Renado, another greaser, wanted for murdering a rancher and his wife down near the border. He called himself Gomez up here, and he was with Chuck Hoskins."

"Oh, he was!" said the lady. "I've seen him around, and I know Hoskins. Where is he now?"

"I dunno," said Mr. Potter reflectively. "I could make a good guess, but—"

"So that's it! And what about Hoskins?"

"He wasn't much hurt, ma'am. I sent him along to town. Now look here," added Mr. Potter earnestly. "I'd hate to have Peggy think—"

"She's got a brain and she's bound to think," intervened Mrs. Wartman severely. "But I guess your feelin's do you credit, young man. Anyhow, what is she to you?"

MR. POTTER felt as though a cyclone had plucked him from his horse and landed him in a thicket of cholla.

"What—what is she to me?" he returned. "Why—well, if you want it straight, I aim to make her—to marry her, if she's willing. There, durn it—and now what's it to you?"

Finding Mrs. Wartman absolutely staggered by his frankness, he took heart and rushed ahead—it was the only course open to him.

"Now you listen, ma'am! I ain't any gunman; I can't usually hit the side of a barn. This was an accident. I'm not a broke puncher. I got two thousand waiting for me in town, and I'm going to collect the price of a good ranch off a man up here who owes it to me. Before you get mad—"

"Mad? Who's getting mad? Do I look it?" exclaimed Mrs. Wartman.

"Well, you don't look very danged happy over it," said Mr. Potter miserably. "But I didn't want you to think—"

"Consarn it, don't you want anybody around here to think?" demanded the lady. "Have you got a cinch on all the thinking apparatus in sight? Now shut your mouth. You've come around under false pretenses, and you're a durned liar. Sheriff Watson is my brother, and he ain't got a bad eye at all. You're not from Santa Fe, young man. You've toted a whole mess of lies in here—and then you tell me not to think! Shut your mouth. You leave me to make these doughnuts, and if you have any talking to do, don't get personal."

Peggy darkened the doorway and then the room became brighter for Mr. Potter. He relapsed into troubled silence, knowing himself in too deep now to take flight yet not seeing how to redeem himself. Mrs. Wartman puzzled him deeply, for she seemed entirely cheerful as she worked, and told Peggy to get some coffee started, as though she quite approved her visitor and was glad to be working to appease his cravings. And all the time she knew him for a most wholehearted liar!

"She trapped me squarely, too," thought Mr. Potter, almost in panic, "and Peggy knows it! The danged thing looks worse and worse, and no hope in sight."

He made tentative approaches at conversation, and presently was feeling somewhat relieved, for Mrs. Wartman chatted volubly and frankly; she had positive ideas on most persons and things, and did not hesitate to express them with force. From her manner, Mr. Potter divined she was more amused than indignant over his pretensions and his lack of veracity, so gradually he took heart.

The kitchen livened up when the first floating brown rings came out of the pan. Mr. Potter assisted Peggy in powdering them; and as she held the plate of sugar in her lap, this operation necessitated a very comfortable degree of intimacy. The more Mr. Potter saw of those merry gray eyes, the more convinced he became that Mrs. Wartman needed a son-in-law at the earliest possible moment, and the more ready he was to hold himself in such a light. He had gathered, here and there, that Peggy Wartman was so far free of any entangling engagements, and he asked no more.

PRESENTLY all three adjourned to the patio—a pleasant place set out with flowers—where Peggy set out a table and Mr. Potter brought forth the coffee and a huge bowl of doughnuts. Mrs. Wartman sat in the shade and fanned herself, resting from her labors, and ordered Mr. Potter to start in. He lost no time doing it.

"How are they?" she demanded, when he was half way through his first.

"Ma'am," said Mr. Potter, looking at her wide-eyed, "I haven't the heart to say."

"Huh?" She sat up indignantly. "D'you mean—why, consarn you, you're laughing at me!"

"No, ma'am, at myself," he said promptly. "Now I'm right sure of it. There's no shadow of doubt whatever. It's just bound to be."

"What is?" she asked.

"What I told you a while ago was going to happen."

"Oh!" Mrs. Wartman relaxed, and a twinkle showed in her eye. "You seem almighty sure of yourself, young man!"

"I am," returned Mr. Potter calmly, seizing another doughnut. He exchanged a smile with the wondering Peggy. "Your mother and I have a secret, Peggy. We'll let you in on it one of these days, maybe."

"We will, will we?" said Mrs. Wartman ominously. Mr. Potter grinned.

"Well, I will anyhow. By the way, do you know Tom Higgins?"

"I should hope so," said the lady. "Do you?"

"M-m. Heard of him," responded Mr. Potter, vaguely. He caught a wink from Peggy, and the girl spoke up.

"Mother doesn't think much of the colonel, Mr. Potter. She always says he's a grasping and miserly old rascal—"

Mrs. Wartman did not reply—she fairly exploded in a torrent of indignant words checked midway by her daughter's laugh and Mr. Potter's grin. Red raised his eyebrows amusedly.

"Making fun of me, are you?" she demanded, and her eyes twinkled. "Well, I don't mind saying Tom Higgins is a white man—about the whitest there is in this country. Too bad you don't know him, Red."

"Uh-huh," said Mr. Potter, his mouth full. "He don't measure up to Jed Cook, I reckon."

"Oh, don't he?" asked Mrs. Wartman, eyeing him in a peculiar manner. "You've met Jed Cook, have you?"

"We had a little talk yesterday. I'm hoping to see more of him one of these days. This sure is fine coffee, Peggy."

"Glad you like it," shot back Mrs. Wartman. "You might call me Ida while you're about it."

"Nope, I got a better name for you," said Mr. Potter audaciously. "By the way, is it easy to get to Eagletail Canyon from here?"

"A trail runs over the hills, yes," said Peggy. "It's only four miles, but you'd have to go afoot. It's not a trail any horse could follow, just now—the rains have washed it away in places, I think."

Mr. Potter nodded. "If you find that hoss of mine in the shed anytime, don't be surprised," he said thoughtfully. "I'm liable to leave him there sometime and take to the trail. How do I hit it from here, so's I won't bother you?"

"Go straight up the canyon, to the alfalfa stand at the other end," said the girl. "It goes off to the left from there—you can't miss it. Climb the hillside."

Mr. Potter nodded again. Having for the moment done full justice to the doughnuts, the idea of tobacco seemed appropriate. He constructed a smoke, then felt vainly in his pockets for matches. Mrs. Wartman spoke up.

"Peggy, go get a box of matches for Mr. Regan."

Mr. Potter lifted a startled gaze as the final word penetrated to his consciousness. Peggy's lips were twitching, but Mrs. Wartman was regarding him severely. A ghastly sense of unreality crept upon him.

"I—I—what did you say?" he stammered weakly. "My name's Potter, ma'am."

"Then who's a liar?" demanded the lady. "You or Tom Higgins?"

He stared blankly at her. "What do you mean, ma'am?"

"Why, Tom Higgins was over here last night, spent the evening. He told us all

about a jasper by the name of Red Regan."

Mr. Potter was thunderstruck. From the corner of his eye he saw Peggy repressing her laughter, and in the visage of Mrs. Wartman he found a bubbling and irrepressible mirth. His lips twitched—then he broke into a roar, in which the others joined. For a moment the roof shook to the merriment.

"You sure did lay one over on me, ma'am," said Mr. Regan, himself again, and he made a rueful grimace. "Why didn't you tell me this in the first place?"

"Why didn't you tell the truth in the first place, instead of firing off a pack of lies about target practice?" retorted Mrs. Wartman. "Well, no harm done, I reckon! Do them fried cakes suit your taste?"

"Do they?" said Mr. Regan significantly. "Ma'am, I'll be content to eat doughnuts like them for all the rest of my life!"

"Oh, will you!" said the lady. She seemed about to say something more, when from outside came a hail. Her expression changed. A swift gleam of alarm came to Peggy's gray eyes.

"Who's that?" queried Mr. Regan, coming to his feet.

"Cal Victor," said the lady of the house, and her lips compressed grimly.

CHAPTER VI

RED REGAN swiftly shoved his chair under the table, and then stepped back inside the kitchen doorway.

"Don't forget those matches, Peggy," he said. "I may need 'em."

The girl nodded and stepped past him. Regan took position behind the door, so that he could observe the patio through the chink as it stood open. Next moment the girl was at his side with a box of matches, and Regan stuffed a few into his pocket. He met her anxious gaze, and chuckled.

"Don't worry!" he said.

"I'm not—only—"

Swiftly, Mr. Regan leaned over and kissed her squarely on the lips.

"Be nice to your company, now," he exclaimed, before the startled girl could protest. "Quick! There he comes!"

He caught one laughing glance from the gray eyes, then Peggy passed out into the patio, where Mr. Victor had made his appearance.

It was obvious the gentleman had dressed carefully for his visit. He wore a suit of store clothes, was shaved to the quick, and had gone so far as to don a white shirt and collar, about which was knotted a flaring red cravat, of the self-tied variety. As he came forward, his high-boned features and long yellow eyes fairly exuded self-complacency. He swept off his hat, and betrayed his bald spot partially raked over by wisps of hair which retained their place by aid of some brilliant cosmetic. Beyond question, Cal Victor would never have showed himself in Quartz City thus arrayed, even on fiesta days.

"Howdy, folks!" he exclaimed genially. "Senora, your servant! I was passing by, and reckoned I'd drop in for a minute and pass the time of day."

"I ain't no senora," said Mrs. Wartman ominously. "I—"

"Beg pardon, ma'am, beg pardon!" said Victor effusively. "No offense meant, none took, I hope. What's this I see—doughnuts? And coffee?"

"What of it?" said Mrs. Wartman, with deliberate insult, so that the blood rushed into Victor's face and then ebbed away again. "I'm not asking you to sit in, hombre."

He straightened up and looked at her, looked at Peggy, then returned his gaze to the older woman. Into his eyes leaped anger, swiftly veiled.

"If that's the way you feel about it, ma'am, I'm right sorry," he said slowly. "I done come over to apologize for the way that Vaca hombre acted in town yesterday. I hear he got served out for it, and I'm glad—I done served him out myself, when I heard about it. You see, I told him to give a note to you, and he tried to give it to Miss Peggy, and thought he was durned smart. He don't think so now. Won't you forgive me, the both of you?"

Cal Victor had not arrived at years of discretion and baldness without knowing how to assume a plausible air on occasion, and furthermore, it was evident that he meant his words literally. Mrs. Wartman melted, instantly repenting the cool insult she had flung at the man. Her hostility was not lessened, yet none the less she had been guilty of a breach of hospitality, and regretted it.

"Don't mention it," she answered at once. "Set down and try a doughnut—Peggy, heat up the coffee, will you?"

"Thanks, ma'am, thanks a heap," said Victor, dropping into a chair. "I know you

don't favor me much, but I got some business I'd like to talk over with you."

In the kitchen, Red Regan came out slightly from behind the door. Here was his man—no doubt of it now, and hatred flamed in him. He repressed it sternly. Then his face cleared as Peggy entered, bearing the coffee-pot, and he turned to her.

She swiftly side-stepped, and lifted the pot in mute threat, but as Regan met her dancing eyes he knew she was not angered. He grinned. The girl held up her hand warningly, with a look toward the patio, and he nodded silent understanding. He beckoned. She regarded him appraisingly, then came closer.

"He's on foot?" said Regan softly.

She nodded. "Mud on his boots. By trail."

Swift as he reached for her, she evaded him, laughingly, and retreated behind the stove. Regan grinned again, and went back to his position, where he could keep an eye on the patio, and rolled a cigaret as he waited.

Victor was munching a doughnut with appreciation, but his flattering encomiums did not bring any great delight to the features of his hostess. Peggy came out with the coffee. She was flushed and laughing, and Mrs. Wartman regarded her suspiciously, but Victor was all admiration.

"My gosh, but you're pretty this afternoon, Miss Peggy!" he observed. "You're always pretty as a picture, for that matter, but you look cheerfuller than ever today! Reckon it's the doughnuts—they'd make anybody cheerful."

"Peggy," said Mrs. Wartman, who had perhaps conjectured the reason for her daughter's flushed appearance, "you go out to the flat and get that small sluice-gate fixed up along the acequia—the broken one. And do it now. I got to talk business with Mr. Victor."

IF VICTOR was moved to protest this order, one glance at the lady made him reconsider the motion. Peggy nodded, took the wide straw hat her mother handed her, and departed. Victor followed her trim figure with his eyes, then poured himself some coffee and tasted it.

"Fine stuff!" he commented. "Now, Mis' Wartman, I'm liable to put some real good, hard money in your pocket."

"That's cheerful news," said the lady with interest. "Honest money?"

Victor showed his teeth in a grin. "You bet, ma'am—honest as daylight. Now, some while back I done found that Eagletail Canyon was open to anybody that wanted it. It had been filed on years ago but the title had lapsed, so me and Vaca have taken it all up, and we got our papers from the land office and can go ahead. Vac's workin' for me, you understand?"

"I know that," said Mrs. Wartman, "but I'd always supposed the canyon was part of the Two Bar H."

"Not by law."

"Law ain't right," said the lady.

"Well, it's possession, anyway. If Colonel Higgins was fool enough to let her slip, and I can take hold, that's his funeral. I've done took hold, and there's great opportunities in that there canyon, ma'am. You know, maybe, how the upper end has a lot o' springs and makes a right smart crick?"

The lady nodded sharply. Victor swallowed more coffee, took another doughnut, and resumed his exposition.

"Between the upper and lower flats, if you remember, there's a place not more'n thirty feet wide—a little gorge where the water trickles down, with most of the springs above. Now, I got six men at work there, greasers, with Vaca directing operations. The idee is to lay a dam right acrost the narrow place, so's the whole upper canyon will be turned into a lake; with its high walls, it should go fine. The whole lower flat will give us a whopping big place for irrigation."

Mrs. Wartman's eyes flashed as she listened to this scheme outlayed, but when she spoke her voice was subdued and carefully repressed.

"That means, I reckon, you'll about use all the water the Two Bar H has been counting on? That crick supplies them, mostly."

"I allow it will be sort of hard on them, till they can make other arrangements," said Victor. "But they have other water supply."

"S'pose Colonel Higgins gets the law on you?" suggested the lady. "He can force you to let him have as much water as he needs—"

"No, he can't," interrupted Victor, and his eyes flashed exultantly. "It's like this, ma'am. I've done formed a company, and the company has got permission to go ahead with the work. We need this here water—it's a big public improvement—and the Two Bar H has got other places they can move the ranch buildings to and settle down. You see, I couldn't take no chances on a greaser like Vaca rounding on me. So I done formed the company, in which he has a share, but

he's got no direction. I'm the whole blamed works," and Victor grinned. "The news ain't made public yet, but it'll get out soon enough. The Solaro Irrigation Company—that's it."

"It's a wonder you don't sell stock in it," said the lady.

"Well, I aim to—that's what I wanted to talk over with you."

"Oh!" Mrs. Wartman eyed him. "Hadn't you better sell to Jed Cook?"

"Not me—him and me have had a row, and I'm clear of him," answered Victor. "But I ain't aiming to sell you stock, ma'am; don't get me wrong. You got a fine place here, and it's worth money. Well, it'd be worth a heap more money if you had enough water to spread out farther down the flat—you only use half the land you got, here. It'd be no trick at all, they tell me, to lay a pipe over the hills from Eagletail and deliver water in your lower flat. Then we could sell off the whole canyon here, cutting it up into farming lots, and could get a whooping good price."

"Hm!" said the lady. "What's your proposition?"

"That you come into the company as secretary and treasurer, ma'am," said Victor earnestly. "You turn in your holdings here. In return, I'll give you a third interest in the company—and if that ain't generous, I don't know what is!"

"And howcome you're so generous?"

"Well, we'd all make money by it, for one thing. For another, ma'am, I'm right smart interested in Miss Peggy. Her and me would make a fine team, looks like, and I'd be a heap proud to settle down—"

Mrs. Wartman rose to her feet.

"I guess ye would," she said, in a voice that burned like acid. "And ye'd be durned glad to have my name pull your dang-dashed company into respectability, too! Listen here! I'd sooner have Peggy married to a good Digger Injun than to a low-down, rattlesnake-hearted, ornery tinhorn crook like you, Cal Victor! Them's my sentiments, straight out. I'd as lief have any personal or business dealings with you as I would with a p'izen Gila monster! So now you've finished your business and got your answer, you can git."

VICTOR turned very pale for a moment. His yellow eyes flared out, and then he smiled in a way not at all nice to see.

"So that's your answer, ma'am? I've tried hard to do you right, and if I was you, I'd think over the matter a day or two, maybe. You might change your mind."

"I might not," said Mrs. Wartman with finality. "I want no truck with snakes."

"Thanks," said Victor, and his eyes narrowed glintingly. "Well, you think you're blamed high and mighty, but I can tell you there's ways of handling women like you. I've met up with your kind before now, down along the border, and they mostly buckle under."

So vicious was his tone, so indescribably menacing his face, that Mrs. Wartman caught her breath. Then she flashed with rage.

"You want a hoss-whip taken to ye?" she demanded fiercely. "You ain't down the border now, you varmint! You're in white man's country. You let me pass word of your threats, and you'll get visited right prompt by a dozen men."

Victor smiled thinly. "You won't pass around any such word."

"And why not?"

"You won't get the chance, that's why."

"I reckon that's dead right," said Red Regan, coming out into full view. "Yes, sir, you sure spoke the truth there!"

CHAPTER VII

RED REGAN lolled indolently in the doorway, a slight smile on his lips, his blue eyes very watchful, his hat pushed back. One hand toyed with the cigarette he had just lit, the other thumb was hooked negligently in his belt.

"You!"

The word escaped Victor like a gasp, as he faced the intruder. His eyes widened. His mouth swung open and remained open. He was for once absolutely petrified by this recognition, and the calm gaze of Regan drove his face ghastly pale. Fear lay in him, obviously. The meeting was an overwhelming shock to him.

"S'prised to see me, are you?" said Regan pleasantly. "You've been so durned busy these days working up the Solaro Irrigation Company that you'd sort of forgotten the little land deal you turned down in Arizona, huh? Not to mention the check you passed off on me, and which I got right in my pocket. Let's you and me have a little talk about that check, feller. Victor's your name now, ain't it? Well, I don't believe in

names. You caught me once with my rope draggin' but now's another day. Yes, let's us talk."

Victor wet his lips unsteadily.

"I—I ain't packing a gun," he faltered.

"You're a liar," said Regan calmly. "The bulge in your coat pocket proves it. Mis' Wartman, I know you hate like hell to touch a snake, but would you mind relieving Mr. Victor's mind by taking the gun out of his pocket? He don't pack a gun, it seems—but I do."

The negligently hooked thumb unhooked itself, and a pistol sprang into Regan's hand. It was a heavy automatic pistol, and it looked like business. Victor regarded it and made no objections as Mrs. Wartman stepped to his side and took another pistol from his pocket. The color was creeping back into his face by degrees.

"Now," said Regan, coming forward, "if you look real close at this gun, you'll see the safety catch is off. I ain't a very good shot. No, sir, I sure ain't one of these here fellers you read about who can throw lead out of a gun and bust balls in the air—nary a time. And this bein' so, I'm sort of dangerous. I usually kill a feller when I don't want to. If I was you, Victor, I wouldn't take any chances a-tall."

"I—I can explain that there check, Regan," said Victor unsteadily. "I can make it good—"

"We'll talk about that," said Regan, with a nod. "It ain't certain I want you to make it good, not a-tall! Now, let's you and me drift along where our talk won't interfere none with the lady. I reckon I'll leave my bronc with you, Mis' Wartman, until I come back—when it'll be, I don't know. Thanks a whole lot for them doughnuts. Could I have a few to take along, and maybe a bit o' bacon, and some coffee and a pot and some sourdough if you got any, and a frying pan? It'd make up a nice little bundle for Victor to tote, to sort of keep his hands occupied and where I can see them."

"What you aiming to do—camp out?" demanded the lady.

"Yes'm. Mr. Victor and me are going into the lonely hills of the desert to watch the moon rise—several moons, maybe. Mr. Victor he's one of these here astrologers, always studying the heavens. There's going to be quite an eclipse that's interesting him, ma'am."

"Well, make it total," said Mrs. Wartman. "I'll rustle you up an outfit."

She hastened into the house.

Cal Victor had been badly shaken, but he was recovering himself rapidly. None the less, he was anything but easy in mind. Threats would have pulled him together, and he could not understand the apparent mood of Red Regan.

"Now see here, sheriff," he began. Regan grinned, perceiving that Victor was ignorant of his resigned office, and intervened.

"Never mind talking, hombre," he said. "We ain't ready to talk yet. Now, I'm going to put away my gun, but don't think it's where it ain't easy to reach. That there gun is what they call a jumping gun, savvy? I don't have to pull her—she just jumps right out in my hand, and there you are. Right new invention."

Mrs. Wartman reappeared, stuffing a paper parcel of doughnuts into a gunnysack that jingled eloquently of coffee-pot and skillet.

"Take it from the lady," said Regan, and Victor obeyed sulkily. "Now sling it over your shoulder and say good-by, and walk off. I'll be right behind."

"So long, ma'am," said Victor, and started toward the end of the patio. Red Regan met the twinkling eyes of Mrs. Wartman and shook hands with her earnestly.

"See you later, maybe, and maybe not," he said. "I'm liable to sneak in and get my bronc any dark night. Since there's no dog on the premises, I won't disturb you."

"Hm!" said the lady. "You're a fast worker, young man—my land!"

FOR Regan had pulled her to him and kissed her. Next instant he was following Victor, and turned for a laughing word.

"See you later—mother! So long."

At this instant the voice of Peggy rang out. Victor had halted, for the girl appeared before him, panting.

"Somebody coming!" she exclaimed. "Looks like Ole Larsen, at least it's his horse!"

"Who's he?" demanded Regan.

"Rides for the Two Bar H."

"Oh! Then walk along, Mr. Victor, and you needn't say good-by to Miss Peggy."

The girl stared at them. Victor passed on and turned out toward the shed, but Regan directed him toward the trail going up the center of the canyon. Mrs. Wartman and Peggy came hurriedly along with Regan. A rider was approaching at top

speed, which meant something out of the ordinary.

He was a freckled, yellow-haired young man with vigorous features, a wide grin, and an air of challenge. He swung from the saddle, lost his grin at sight of Victor, and then doffed his hat to the ladies.

"I'm lookin' for a feller named Regan," he said, and Mrs. Wartman nodded.

"Here he is. Red, meet Ole Larsen."

Ole shook hands, then fidgeted and seemed somewhat embarrassed. Regan grinned.

"Spit it out, Ole! We got no secrets from our friend Victor. You know him, maybe? He's an awful nice man, Victor is—you wouldn't think it, maybe, to look at him, but he is just the same. Him and me are bosom friends. We're going off together on a little trip, too. Spit her out."

"Well, if you say so," returned Ole. "Th' Old Man sent me over to see if you were here. Somebody telephoned him from town that the sheriff was starting out to find you, with a posse. Seems like a killing has been reported, and you're getting blamed."

Regan chuckled. "That so? They'll change their mind when they find that feller in the road and learn all about it. I left a message there for the sheriff, on purpose. Soon's they find him, they'll turn around and go home. Thanks all the same, Ole—"

Catching sight of the shocked expression in the girl's face, Regan turned to her, suddenly sober.

"Look here, Miss Peggy, I didn't want you to know I'd had to kill a man this morning. He wasn't a man, but a snake—he murdered a rancher and tortured the rancher's wife before killing her, down on the border. He's a bad greaser, but he's good now, I guess."

Peggy nodded, and met his gaze squarely.

"I'm glad you told me, Red," she said, and something in her voice made Regan's heart leap. He smiled, and glanced at Larsen.

"Want to get some mud on them nice new overalls of yours?" he asked. "If so, leave your hoss with mine, in the shed, and join our little party."

Ole Larsen grinned. "I dunno—I'm sort of getting things sprung on me," he said. "Just who's giving the party?"

"I'm giving it," said Regan. "Mr. Cal Victor is the guest of honor. Victor might like to tell you I'm a sheriff or something—ain't that it, Victor?"

The yellow eyes flashed him a murderous look.

"That's it," said Victor sullenly.

"Oh!" said Ole. "Lucky I didn't have time to put on my high-heeled boots, huh? Sure, I'll go along."

"Mrs. Wartman, can you spare us a slicker—never mind. Ole has his saddle all harnessed up. Bring your slicker, Ole, and your tooth-brush and your shaving-soap, and leave your poor hoss to eat up some free provender here. Time we were off."

"Where we going," demanded Victor angrily.

"Well, that depends," said Regan. "It may depend on you, and it may depend on the judge. Run along, Ole, never mind him."

Ole, appearing hugely pleased, departed with his horse.

"Start out," said Regan. "He'll pick us up. So long, folks, for this time!"

He strolled away after Victor, following the man closely. He turned to exchange a last wave of the hand with the two women, and saw Ole hastily emerge from the shed and come plunging after. Then they were heading up the little canyon between the beds of vegetables. The afternoon was half gone.

Ole caught up, and strode along in silence with his rolled slicker. When they reached the upper flat of the canyon and the alfalfa stand, Regan saw the trail winding up the hillside to the left. He promptly ordered Victor to halt and stand with his back to them, and drew Ole a little back, out of hearing.

"Do you know this trail?"

"Sure," said Ole, searching his face with curious gaze.

"I'd like to find a little quiet spot, maybe sheltered—"

"Right. Got the very thing," said Ole promptly. "There's an old prospector's shack about a mile off, and a hole in the ground where pay dirt should have been but wasn't—or maybe quartz. I dunno. Anyhow, the shack's there."

"Go ahead and lead the way to it, then."

Ole took the lead, Victor followed, and Regan brought up the rear.

Since the very thing he had decided must not happen, had of itself happened, and he had come face to face with Victor, Red Regan had lost no time in adopting a vague plan of campaign. Now as he followed

along the trail, this plan took clearer shape in his mind, and he wasted no vain regrets over the meeting.

"The main thing is to turn it to account," he told himself. "A fast worker—that's what she called me. Well, why not? This jasper thinks I'm still a sheriff. I can see how to handle him, sort of—but Jed Cook is more important to the public welfare. He's a hoss of another color, you bet!"

"Either I've got to work along the original lines and lay low for what turns up, or else I can agree that it's turned up—and work durned fast. The chances are just as good, or bad, either way. Guess I'd better agree with Mrs. Wartman."

Ole looked back. Regan grinned cheerfully, and lifted his voice in song.

"Oh, Jackie died there on the floor,
And says with his last breath:
'Boys, go away and sin no more,
For the wages of sin is death!
I shorely was her man,
But I done her wrong!'"

Ole showed his face in a broad grin, and plunged ahead.

CHAPTER VIII

FROM his name and his appearance Ole was Swedish but his idea of a mile was Irish—decidedly so.

In fact, it was much closer to two miles, thought Regan. It was also away from the main trail, attained only by a long overgrown track. The shack was no more than a ruin, extremely uninviting in appearance, but the roof was fairly intact. It was set in a V-shaped niche in a cliff, so there was no approach except from in front. Off to the left, by the open end of the V, showed a four-foot prospect hole entering the cliff.

"Now, Mr. Victor, set down your burden and set down yourself," said Regan, as the three men came to the niche, "and take off your boots."

Mr. Victor did so, in helpless resignation, but his yellow eyes flamed lambently. As his boots came off, Ole held his nose.

"My gosh! He's got socks on—but that's because he's all slickered up in store clothes today! He ain't used to socks. Neither are his feet. Them feet are strong, but no stronger than the socks, Red."

"He don't appreciate your comments," said Regan. "I'll hide his boots later on and show you where they are, Ole. They sure are needed in these hills. A feller might get away without his boots, but he'd have a hell of a time doing it! Now, while Mr. Victor looks at the beauties of nature and maybe smokes a cigarette, let's you and me withdraw a pace and converse."

The two men drew to some distance from the badgered captive, and sat down.

"You listen close," said Regan, soberly. "This hombre is bad, savvy? Just now he thinks I'm a sheriff on his trail. It ain't so, but he thinks so. I'm workin' pardners with Tom Higgins, so you needn't be backward—"

"The Old Man said as much," broke in Ole, with a nod of comprehension. "Go ahead. I'll stick as long as you want. What you going to do with this jasper?"

"Leave him with you," said Regan, and grinned. "I don't care what you do with him, so long's you don't kill him and don't let him get away. You got a gun?"

OLE displayed the same gun taken from Victor.

"Mis' Wartman done give it to me. Loaded, too."

"All right. You'd better go through him for a knife before I leave. Now, Ole, don't you say a durned word to this cuss about me, or you'll ball up the whole game, savvy? I'd suggest that you lie to him—lie like hell about anything you like, but chiefly about how Tom Higgins has called in friends from outside, from Albuquerque or Washington or London or Paris, and inside of two days is going to put Jed Cook in the penitentiary. Make up a good healthy lie that'll hold water. I don't believe in telling lies unless they're going to do good in the world, and then I want to make 'em so durned noble they'd fool St. Peter himself. Savvy?"

"Heap plenty." Ole grinned again. "I'll tell you something. Me and this feller Victor had a scrap when he first struck these parts—it was that what started the trouble between th' Old Man and Jed Cook, I reckon. I trimmed him. I know the cuss, and I know him too durned well to take chances with him, you'd better believe! I heard about your scrap with Vaca, too, and if I was you, I'd watch sharp behind me."

Regan nodded soberly.

"Thanks, I will. Now, to tell the truth, I ain't right sure what I'm going to do, except that I'm going to move durned fast and do something, and I don't want to

draw Higgins into it. I wish there was some way I could make myself an airplane."

"What for?"

"I'd like to leave here flying and land right square in Quartz City about nine o'clock tonight without being seen."

"Well, you might manage it," said Ole thoughtfully. "If you snake back to Wartman's and take your hoss and get over to the ranch. Th' Old Man has bought him a new Cadrack car, and she goes like a bat out of hell. There's no speed laws in this county, yet. If I was you, I'd be in Quartz City by eight o'clock, about dark."

"Where does Tom leave his car?"

"Out front of the house. He's buildin' a shed for it, but she ain't finished yet. But you holler right out loud, because there's two-three shotguns on the premises liable to go off without warning."

Regan chuckled. "Good. You stay here til' I get back, savvy? I don't know when it'll be: maybe midnight, maybe tomorrow, maybe next week. You got grub and a slicker, and you don't need to cherish your prisoner none too tender."

"Leave him to me," said Ole significantly.

"All right. You go through with him, now." Regan rose. "If there's any papers on him, hand 'em over."

Regan took out his gun and commanded Victor to sit still, and Ole performed his job in a very thorough manner. A large bundle of papers were folded in a wallet, inside Victor's coat pocket, and when these went into Regan's hands, Victor let out a protest.

"Is this robbery, or what? You got a warrant for me, Regan? If you have, trot it out."

"Feelin' brash, are you?" said Regan coldly. "Well, feller, I ain't ready to talk with you, just yet. That'll come later. I got to gather in more important crowbait than you, just at present, so you can set here and rest your hot heels." He gave Ole a glance. "Don't you do any talking with this hombre, Ole—we don't want to let any news get out of what's going on, savvy? You sit mum. I s'pose Sheriff Stevens is more or less under Jed Cook's thumb?"

"Nope," said Ole, "he ain't—sheriff's pretty square. Still and all, he ain't going to be none too keen to jump Cook, specially on the sayso of an outside sheriff like you, Regan."

Regan nodded, and noted that the prisoner's yellow eyes were bulging at all this.

"Well, I'd better make this here shack my jail until things are all sewed up," he said cheerfully. "If I don't bring in Cook by midnight, set tight and don't worry. So long."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Victor hastily. "Ain't you goin' to give me a chance to square things about that check, Regan?"

Regan surveyed him for a moment.

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't," he said slowly. "Depends on how I come out with bigger game than you, Victor. I got business of Colonel Higgins' on hand as well as my own."

TURNING his back, he strode away, following the trail he had come.

His plans were vague, but this did not worry him in the least. Red Regan had a confirmed belief in luck, and believed in playing it hard when it was good. In his previous encounter with Cal Victor, then under another name, luck had served him a wretched turn—it was sheer bad luck dogging him at every step and blocking him off into the path of utter defeat. Now things looked altogether different.

Queer, too, he reflected, the changes in what one might expect! Apparently in common with everyone else, he had figured this Victor as a pronounced bad man—and in this he still concurred with general opinion. From the moment Victor had come face to face with him so unexpectedly this afternoon, however, the man's nerve had been absolutely shattered.

"Little things bulk pretty durned big," thought Regan. "I looked for a real scrap with Victor—instead, I'm liable to have it with Vaca and Jed Cook. Reckon I might pay Sheriff Stevens a call tonight, too, and sort of put out feelers about that reward. So Victor is durned anxious to square up with me, is he? Prob'ly Cook, being a lawyer, has told him that his trick down in Arizona might have a stinger in the tail."

Here among the western slopes, daylight was already misting into the bluish shades of evening when Regan came into Wartman canyon again, though out in the valley it would not be dark for nearly an hour longer. He sighted nobody round the house, though he sniffed most appetizing odors, and headed straight for the shed. He had barely slapped the saddle on his cayuse when Mrs. Wartman and Peggy appeared, breathless.

"My land!" exclaimed the former. "And now what?"

"Business—a whole lot of it," said Regan, laughing. "Peggy, will you please run in and get me about half a dozen more doughnuts? I won't be able to hit a supper table tonight, and I'm in a hurry."

The girl departed at once. Mrs. Wartman came closer and watched with appreciation as Regan drove a kick behind the ribs or his cayuse and then drew home the cinch in one rapid movement.

"You sure are a fast worker, young man," she declared, laughing. Then she sobered. "Look here, you heard what that varmint said about the scheme he's pulling off in Eagletail Canyon? You know what it means to Tom Tiggins?"

Regan turned and surveyed her quizzically.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "You seem a whole lot interested in Tom Higgins, mother!"

"Never you mind—what you going to do about it?"

"Why, I'm headed for the Two Bar H right now, so don't worry about Higgins. You worry about yourself. When Cal Victor don't come back, that Vaca is liable to head over here looking for him."

"I sure hope he does," said the lady fervently. "I got a scatter-gun in there, double-barrelled, just waiting for him!"

"All right—then don't shoot me by mistake when I come back."

Peggy appeared with a packet of food, and as he took it, Regan's eye gave her warning. She skipped nimbly away, and he laughed.

"All right, Peggy—you wait till I have more time! Thanks for the grub. So long, folks; I'll be back later on—sometime. See you then!"

And, flinging the two women a kiss and a laugh, Red Regan rode away—spurring.

He did not spare his horse, for in this game he felt that time was at a premium, though he was not sure just why. Not until he reached the Two Bar H road did he recall the papers he had taken from Victor. He got them out and ran over them carefully, finding most of them to deal with the Solaro Irrigation Company. When he had digested their general contents, and that of the other papers, Regan looked up to find himself approaching the ranch-house, before which the colonel's new mud-splashed car was standing.

His arrival had been noted. Two or three men were running from the bunk-house, and on the veranda of the ranch-house was standing Colonel Higgins in person.

"Hello there, Red!" came his booming greeting. "Glad to see you!"

Regan dismounted by the car, which stood twenty feet away.

"Got gas in this thing?" he asked.

"Sure. Want to use it?" Higgins started down the steps. "I'll run you to town—"

"You will, like hell!" said Regan, scrambling into the car. "You got other work to do! Up in Eagletail you'll find Vaca and six other greasers. They're figuring on building a dam and cutting off your water supply. You take your boys up there and clean 'em out, savvy? Do it inside the next two hours. Plug Vaca if you want, but don't hurt the others."

The astonished Higgins stood staring, and his punchers stood listening.

"But I dassn't make a move—"

"When in hell did you get to be an old woman, Tom?" snapped Regan, spinning the self-starter into life with his heel. "You do what I say! Nobody's going to get the law on you except Victor and Cook. I got Victor where I want him, and I aim to have Cook there, too. You go up and wipe that place clean, savvy? And get that hombre Vaca. And see here! You got a telephone?"

"Yes, confound your dog-goned hide!" boomed the colonel. "Hold on, there! Where's Ole?"

"He's workin' for me." Regan grinned, and threw in the gear. "You call up Sheriff—wait a minute—how long does it take to get to town?"

"Search me. Takes me about twenty minutes."

"Well, in ten minutes you call up Sheriff Stevens. Tell him about me being Potter, and how I was late sheriff down below, and vouch for me. Say I'm coming to see him."

"But what you going to do?" wailed the colonel.

"Foller a hunch!" sang out Regan, and stepped on the gas. So long!"

CHAPTER IX

SHERIFF STEVENS of Solaro County was a heavy-set, burly, aggressive man of middle years, whose probity was beyond question. He was friendly with

everybody, and if Jed Cook's influence had helped to elect him, there was nothing wrong about that.

Sheriff Stevens, like most others in Quartz City, looked upon Jed Cook as a man of great respectability—a sharp lawyer, no doubt, but a man of growing power and wealth and influence. And Jed Cook had deeply impressed the sheriff with the undoubted fact that the old lawless days were gone, and that Quartz City would grow according as its sheriff enforced the laws and kept disputes in the courts instead of in the streets. Jed Cook was emphatically not a man of action, and the more he could throw into the mill of the courts, the more pickings his nimble brain could find among the chaff of that mill. Jed Cook was building just as many another man has built in many another county seat from Illinois to the Pacific Coast, within the past ten years. He was shrewd, merciless, and knew every twist and turn of the law as it could be applied to his own growth. And he had grown fast.

At eight o'clock on this evening, Sheriff Stevens, who was smoking a quiet pipe in the office with a deputy, was called to the telephone. The rumbling tones of Colonel Higgins reached him, and with no little astonishment, the sheriff learned the identity of Potter.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "He done left a note for me on that greaser's corpse this morning, and turned out he was dead right. So I came home and dismissed the posse. Chuck Hoskins has skipped out of town, I hear, and prob'ly your friend will get his two thousand. Coming to see me, is he?"

"Sure is," said the colonel. "And if I was you, I'd sort of fall in with the boy—he ain't such a bad sort. I've knowed him ever since he was a kid. He made a durned good sheriff down there, only luck busted him."

"I'll be right glad to see him," said the sheriff. "Sure, I've heard of Red Regan. All right, Tom. So long."

When he looked up from the telephone, Sheriff Stevens found Red Regan in the doorway, grinning cheerfully.

"That was Higgins, eh?" said Regan. "Me, I'm Potter. Glad to meet you, sheriff. Just dropped in to see if you wanted any information from me about that killing this morning."

"Come in and set down, Regan—glad to meet you!" said the sheriff heartily, and introduced his deputy. "Why, no; you were dead right about that there greaser, as I found. I've had him photographed and I've wired already to Phoenix, and I'll get off a letter with the pictures in the morning. I reckon the check will come right long."

"Well, I'd ought to split that there check with you," observed Regan. "Now, if I was a deputy, for example, it might be a good thing all around, sheriff! Here's the idea. Down below, there's a warrant out for a feller by the name of Henry Olmstead—for giving bad checks and so forth. I been chasing him quite a while—resigned my star to keep at it. I've heard he's up in these parts and I'm on the prowl.

"Now," went on Regan, with apparent carelessness, but in reality picking his words, "if your office was to pick up this feller around here, it wouldn't be so bad. If I was deputy say, and you wired down to Solvang County for full information about this here Olmstead, and arranged to hold him until Arizona could extradite him and take him back—you know! Of course, I may be wrong. He may not be around here. Still, I'm playing a hunch."

The sheriff considered. "Where you stopping?"

"With Tom Higgins. I got his car outside now—I'm sort of rushed tonight, with some business I want to see after."

"Might's well swear you in, if you want," said the sheriff. "It ain't permanent?"

REGAN could have laughed at this question. He knew well enough Sheriff Stevens did not care to take on a permanent deputy who might eventually do him out of the star.

"Lord, no!" he responded lightly. "I was just thinking that if you and me split the two thousand, as we will, it might look a heap better if I was known as your deputy. Besides which—"

"Oh, you win," said Sheriff Stevens. "Gimme a deputy's star, Bill."

Five minutes later, Mr. Regan was a duly authorized deputy sheriff for Solaro County, and carried a bright and twinkling star to prove the fact. He did not carry it in sight, however.

"Well, sheriff, I'll be drifting," he announced. "Mighty glad to've met you, and I'll be along in a couple of days with some news and more time to burn, I reckon. Jed Cook live anywhere near here?"

"Turn to your right next corner, go three blocks—big white house next the Meth'dist

Church. Can't miss it." The sheriff eyed his new deputy sharply. "Look here, Regan, him and Tom Higgins don't hit it off, and I don't want any trouble started."

Mr. Regan looked very wide-eyed and innocent.

"Sho', now!" he exclaimed. "Trouble? Not on your life, sheriff! Besides which, I had a long talk with Cook—when was it—yesterday. I got a little business deal on with him. No, there won't be any trouble started by me, be sure of that! I can't say I love Jed Cook, but I think maybe his quarrel with Tom can be patched up. I aim to patch it up, if I can."

"Dog-gone, that's the right spirit!" said the sheriff heartily. "Well, so long! Drop in first time you get a chance."

Mr. Regan departed, chuckling softly in the darkness, and headed for Jed Cook's house.

None realized better than he just how stiff a task now lay ahead of him. He was about to deal with a man suspicious by nature, a hard and shrewd and brainy man, and what was worse, a man who was essentially of the town and not of the range. His rapid skimming over those papers taken from Victor had given him a cue to act upon, but Regan none the less knew he was about to take long chances and would need all his wits.

He realized this the more, on approaching Jed Cook's house, to find it ablaze with lights, while two or three cars were parked in front and several vehicles from outside town. A glad buzz of voices resounded from the house. Leaving his engine going, Regan went up the front steps and knocked sharply at the door.

NEXT instant, he knew luck was playing with him, and took heart. Jed Cook in person opened the door.

"Come in, come in—more folks, huh—huh?" Cook's voice changed, as he saw the identity of his caller. "Huh? We got a church sociable going on here, Potter. You want me?"

"Yeah," said Regan softly. "Shut the door and come here a minute. I got a message from Cal."

Mr. Cook glanced over his shoulder, then stepped out and closed the door.

"Cal?" he asked sharply. "Who do you mean?"

"Victor. Him and me and Vaca had a long confab this afternoon, and I'm in on the deal—I got a couple o' thousand I can put into the stock company," said Regan coolly. "But that ain't why I'm here, Cook—there's hell to pay out yonder, and I done come for you on the hop—"

"Who's out there in that car?" snapped Cook, peering at the big Cadrack. "Whose car is that?"

"Mine, for the time being. Belongs to Higgins by rights, but I had to get here in a hurry, so I appropriated it," returned Regan. Cook snarled an oath.

"You consarned fool! You don't want to butt up against the law—"

"Now, you shut up and let me talk," said Regan plaintively. "Borrowing a car ain't any hanging matter—and there's a hanging matter you got to attend to, durn quick."

"Eh? Huh? What is it?" demanded Cook with growing emphasis on each word. "Huh?"

"Why, late this afternoon, the whole Two Bar H outfit, with Higgins leading 'em, came over to clean up our camp," said Regan. "Victor warned 'em off, but one of the crowd sort of lost his head. Feller they called Ole, a Swede, I reckon—"

"Yes, yes, I know the man," said Jed Cook. "What about it?"

"Well, he done cut loose with a six-gun and killed one of the native workmen, and Vaca plugged him. Then they rode over us. Somebody laid out Vaca with the butt of a gun, but he got away. Victor done put a bullet into Higgins' leg, and then him and me beat it in a hurry. Lead sure was flying, I can tell you! Cal's got a bullet-scrape around his ribs and can't travel. He says for me to get you out there quick's I could, so I got a hoss and went to the Bar H, found the car there, and borrowed her. Here I am. Cal don't know what to do, and neither do I. Cal's right set on coming here and setting on your front stoop till his wounds gets well, and I sort of judged you wouldn't want that—"

"Gosh, no!" said Jed Cook. "Now keep still and let me think. This is excellent news, excellent! Now I'll soak Higgins and soak him hard!"

Rubbing his long, thin hands together, Cook's solemn horse-face stared out at the road. Regan rolled a smoke and waited, confident that his final clever touch would force the action he desired. And a moment later, he blessed the hunch he had played.

"Good," said Cook decisively. "I'll have

to go with you right now and find Cal. Just where is he?"

Regan though rapidly, remembering the topography of the county.

"According to him, it's a little canyon two mile south of Eagletail, by the name of Canyon Rojo. Bein' a stranger here, I reckon I couldn't find it at night—"

"Red Canyon—yes, I know it well," said Jed Cook. "We can get within a mile of it with the car. Excellent! We can get there in half an hour, see Victor, and be back here before midnight. Then you'll have to leave the car somewhere—you'll have to arrange about that. I don't want you arrested for the theft of the car."

"I'll fix it up all right," said Mr. Regan. "If you're going, let's go."

"I'll get my hat and coat, and arrange to slip away. Be right out."

Regan lit his cigaret and strolled out to the car, feeling highly pleased. It was not everybody, he complacently told himself, who could put over a lie on Jed Cook in this fashion!

"Fast worker, cowboy!" he muttered, and grinned. "Play your luck hard while she's running strong, now! If you got to be a liar, be a durned good one."

One must admit, if pressed, that absolutely no defense could be made for the deplorable ethics and the absolutely immoral course of Mr. Regan. He was neither a movie actor with the censor on the horizon, nor a dime-novel hero able to plug everybody in sight and come clear in the final chapter. He was a human, irresponsible young man, bucking an apparently hopeless game in which all the cards were stacked against him—and he did it in his own reckless way, without a thought to what folks would think about it. He was not worried a mite about what people would think. He was worrying a good deal, though, about his ability to get Jed Cook where he wanted him—out of town and on the range.

His worried feelings died away when, in five minutes, Cook left the house and came out to the car. One look showed the eminent lawyer the car was empty save for Regan, and without more ado he climbed in. He did not, however, obey the invitation to get in beside Regan. Instead, he climbed into the back seat.

"Dog-gone!" thought Regan in sudden dismay, as he started the car. "I hadn't figured on this—now I'm up against it!"

He had visions of something cold and round pressed against the back of his neck before long, and he was not far off. Jed Cook knew exactly what he was doing when he got in that back seat.

CHAPTER X

MR. REGAN made adroit efforts to get his passenger into the front seat. He mentioned the warmth directly behind the windshield, but Jed Cook was not cold. He mentioned the difficulty of conversing, but Jed Cook preferred his driver to watch the road. After one or two further attempts, Mr. Regan quit.

He quit cold, too. His flurry of insistence had given his passenger the alarm. He could sense this in every nerve, and he vainly cursed his own folly. Then, having been fool enough to put his head in the noose, he braced up and coolly considered things. In the windshield he could sight the reflected figure of Jed Cook, against the glare of the headlights ahead, and he could even glimpse something that glittered.

Regan did not turn around to make certain what that something was. He understood perfectly well that Jed Cook was a man who took no chances; so having committed one folly, he took no risk of committing others. So long as Cook held him covered with that pistol, he was helpless, unless he wanted to reach his own gun and this was far from his desire.

"Where do I go?" he called over his shoulder, without turning. The big car was doing fifty on the level dirt road. "Take the turnout for the Two Bar H?"

"Yes," snapped the voice of Cook, short and curt with menace. "A mile before you reach the ranch, there's a trail leads out to the left. Take it. It's not good road, but you can make it nearly to the canyon."

"That settles it," thought Regan to himself, desperately. "Somehow, I've got to stop the car, get a gun on him, and put him where I want him—and there's only one way to do it. Lucky I'm an acrobat with a car! Sharp and sudden is the only hope."

He remembered the spot where a trail branched from the Two Bar H road, off toward the foothills and west-running peaks beyond. That trail crossed the creek, while the ranch road wound on beside the water. If he failed to turn at this point, Jed Cook would undoubtedly go into serious executive session.

Regan grinned. For the first time, he

realized that, in telling Cook a beautiful lie, he had practically told the truth—provided Tom Higgins had raided Victor's camp! Details were bound to be different, but in general, the facts were about the same, barring a killing. Regan did not think Higgins would have to do any shooting in the course of his raid, having only Hernan Vaca and the half-dozen Mexican workmen to turn adrift. So thinking, he came to the turnout for the Two Bar H, and took it.

"Settle down to it now, feller!" he told himself grimly. "You got to wreck this car and do it right—and then grab Cook before he realizes the wreck was intentional. Yes, sir, you got to climb all over him! If you don't do faster work now than you've ever done before, your goose is cooked."

REGAN switched the lights off and on, pretended to find something amiss with the gear-shift, managed to get his body out from under the wheel. Perforce, he had to slow down on this tougher side road. In the glass windshield, he watched for the almost invisible reflection, but failed to catch it. He knew Jed Cook was drawn far back now, waiting, watching his every motion.

Desperate, with no choice in the matter but to take huge chances, Regan took them. Ahead showed the turning, with a low, rude bridge crossing the creek.

"There's your road," came Cook's voice from behind.

"Good," said Regan cheerfully, praying they would not turn turtle.

He slowed down, swung the wheel around, flung himself sideways from beneath it. Came a terrific crash, a jolting, jarring smash hurling Regan up against the top and down again. Glass slithered. The lights went off abruptly. Another plunging crash, a wild cry from the rear of the car, and the car stopped, half in water. It had smashed the little guard-rail of the bridge, plunged off into the creek, and was at rest.

"Are you safe, Cook?" called Regan dazedly, wondering to find himself no worse hurt than by a severe shaking-up. He had no response.

Raising himself, he felt around in the darkness. Cook had been violently hurled against the back of the front seat, and now lay inert in the bottom of the car. Climbing over, Regan opened the side door, took Cook by the collar, and dragged him out into two feet of water. He went on with him up the bank, and then dropped him, and himself stood trembling.

"Damned fool!" he told himself weakly. The thing had been hard to do, but it was done. He had Jed Cook where he wanted him, at last. Angry at his own shattered nerves, Regan sat down and rolled a cigaret and lighted it.

It was hard to realize that he had been at work only a day—that only this morning he had ridden out of Quartz City with a lard bucket beside his saddle! This crash had been the finishing touch. He was in no shape now to go ahead with anything; he must sleep. Yet any rest here and now was impossible. He must finish the job. If only he had been able to get as far as Wartman Canyon, as he had first planned! Now he was afoot and at a loose end.

He finished his cigaret, then examined his victim. So far as he could tell, Cook was not badly hurt—shaken up and bruised, doubtless, but with nothing broken. Finding the man now unarmed, Regan waded out to the car and explored it. On the floor of the tonneau he discovered a pistol. He had been right.

He was back at the shore again when he paused, listening. From the night came to him a mutter of shrilly, angry voices and the tramping of horses. Someone was approaching—a number of men. From which direction?

Regan went out to the bridge. The starlight was not brilliant, for a thin haze overspread the sky, yet it was sufficient. He waited, a dark shadow at the end of the bridge, and presently found the horses were coming from the direction in which Jed Cook had headed him—along this side trail. They were approaching slowly, at a walk. The voices came more clearly to him now, speaking in Mexican, with the soft drawling slur of peons.

"I am not hired to fight," exclaimed one, bitterly, with a torrent of oaths. "Have I come here to fight, caballeros? No. It means the jail here in this accursed country."

"True," said another. "We are brave men, but why should we fight? Senor Victor is gone, Senor Vaca is gone—dios! Are we fools, then? We are not. We are hired to work, not to fight. When the Americanos say get out, we are fools if we fight."

Suddenly Regan comprehended everything, in a rush of exhilirating wonder. Here were the half-dozen Mexican workmen—Colonel Higgins had raided the canyon

after all! But what of Hernan Vaca?

"Senor Vaca would not have run away," said one drawling peon voice. "He told us to fight if anyone tried to drive us off—ha! Then he goes away and thinks we are fools enough to fight and go to a grińgo jail. No, we are not cats of that color, hombres!"

So Vaca had been gone—where? Over to the Wartman place, perhaps. Regan frowned over this bad news. He had counted on Higgins eliminating Hernan Vaca. However, it would not much matter. Vaca could do nothing, with Cook and Victor taken care of.

NOW the riders were close upon the bridge. When they were six feet away, the foremost caught sight of the dark mass of the car, to the side, and a sharp exclamation broke out. At the same instant, Regan straightened up and showed himself before them.

"Los manos arriba!" he ordered sharply, as the horses shied. "Up with 'em, friends! I am a deputy sheriff. Who are you?"

Diplomatic speech, this, well calculated to keep the startled Mexicans from any panicky use of guns. Quieting their horses, they obeyed. One of them made response.

"We are honest men, senor officer! We were hired to work in Eagletail Canyon, but tonight came men who destroyed our camp and ordered us away."

Regan drew a breath of relief. No fight in these men.

"Good—put down your hands, amigos. Where is Senor Vaca?"

"We do not know, senor caballero! He went away toward dark, some time before the other men came. Vaqueros, those, from the Two Bar H."

"I know," said Regan, for their puzzlement. "Now, it is likely that Senor Vaca will be arrested, and Senor Victor is already a prisoner. Do you wish to save yourselves from sharing the jail with him?"

A chorus of eager assents made response. These Mexican from below the border were only too anxious to keep out of American jails, and despite a racial affinity, they could not depend on the Americanized natives of the country for any help.

"Very well," said Regan. "Leave me two of your horses, and two of you mount behind others. All of you go on to town, and say nothing to anyone of what has taken place tonight. Do you understand?"

"Verdamente, senor!" came the eager response. They were overjoyed to get out of their predicament in so easy a fashion.

Without delay two of them dismounted, turning over their horses. Regan questioned them, learned how Higgins and his men had fallen upon their camp like destroying angels, but without a fight, sending them off unharmed. He told them to get on their way, and they were only too glad to obey.

He watched them tramping hollowly across the echoing little bridge, to the hard earth beyond, and so off into the darkness. Then he went to Jed Cook, who still lay senseless by the bank. With an effort, Regan lifted the limp body and carried it to the bridge. He had some little trouble getting Cook into a saddle, but managed it at length, and then tied the man's feet beneath the horse's belly. He himself mounted, rode with Cook at his side, and started for Wartman Canyon.

Regan was astonished and even alarmed to realize, as he rode, an odd weakness. Water-soaked to his waist, sore and bruised in a dozen places, he was yet puzzled to account for the peculiar feeling that was creeping over him—very like collapse. So far as he could tell, he was nowhere badly injured, no bones were broken. Yet the sense of something amiss persisted in him.

There was something wrong—he knew it almost in panic, and drew rein. He dismounted. As he did so, he grimaced with pain, for his bruises had been sharp. He stood there a moment, fumbling for a match, then stiffened. A peculiar, unmistakable odor came to his nostrils and held him motionless—the smell of blood.

He got out a match and trailed it across his saddle, looked down at himself. He perceived his whole leg was soaked, not with water alone, as he had thought, but with blood. It came from his thigh. What he had taken to be only a bruise was in reality a short, deep gash, no doubt made by a splinter of glass from the windshield. A small artery cut, perhaps.

Regan went to his captive. He took from Cook's breast pockets some papers, then found a large linen handkerchief. This he tore in two and knotted again. The knot he placed just above the gash, and loosely tying the handkerchief, climbed back into the saddle. There he fumbled in his pockets until he found his pencil, a metal patent container for leads, and inserting this under his leg, he twisted it until the improvised tourniquet drew tight. Another match

showed him the blood was almost ceasing from the gaping wound. The pressure of his leg against the saddle held the tourniquet in place.

HE NOW gave his attention to Jed Cook, whose wrists he lashed securely to the saddle-pommel. None too soon, either. Barely had he finished when Cook lifted his head, sighed, came awake with a start. Unable to realize his predicament, Cook uttered an angry oath. Regan lighted a match and cut him short.

"Shut up!" No talking. Look at this." Regan briefly flashed the star from inside his shirt. "I'm an officer, understand? Shut up and don't talk or I'll tap you over the head."

He then proceeded to blindfold his prisoner with a portion of his own ripped trouser-leg, and took up his course again. He was none too happy about it.

He might yet be able to play out the game he had started, though the difficulties were next to insuperable. However, Regan set his teeth—there was no other course, and he might yet have a chance to win. He must keep Jed Cook away from the Two Bar H and in ignorance of his whereabouts; this was the prime consideration.

So, regretfully, Regan rode on past the Two Bar H and toward Wartman Canyon. Only once was the silence broken between the two men, and then by Regan.

Jed Cook knew better than to tempt the fulfillment of the savagely-voiced threat to silence him. This in itself betrayed how correct Regan had been in his reasoning—showed that the man was smashed out of his usual cold efficiency. Leaving town behind, the crash, the consequent awakening to find himself a prisoner, tricked and decoyed, must have bitten in horribly, all of it.

For despite everything, Cook had been playing the game usually so successfully; he had come into a country where men did things, and sitting there behind his desk, had played the cards to get rich off the doings of other men. His brain worked for him, not his hands. He was no outdoors man, no man of the range, but one accustomed to plot with the intricacy of the law to aid him, behind closed doors. Now he was abruptly jerked out of his element and had not a single clue to the real happenings of the night or previous day.

"Not one word from you, mind," said Regan, as they approached the Wartman ranch. "I'm an officer, I been after you for a long time, and now I got you. What I'm going to do with you, I'm not sure yet—depends on others. I may get rich off you, and may not. I may let you go, and I may put you into the penitentiary. If you let out so much as one word, though, I'll give you the butt of my pistol. I'll talk to you when I'm ready, and not before. We're not nearly at our destination yet—have to walk a mile or so. So shut up."

Cook made no response, beyond a growled oath. Possibly it occurred to him that he was dealing with a madman. There was a certain weariness in Regan's voice, a certain forced note, wholly unnatural. They went on in silence.

Of the time, Regan had slight conception. He knew it could not be very late. As they gained Wartman Canyon and sighted a glimmer from the house, he realized the two women had not yet retired. The horizon was breaking with an effulgent glow—moonrise.

Directing the horses toward the shed, Regan halted them and dismounted. This action loosened his temporary bandage, and he put his hand to the gash. As nearly as he could tell, the bleeding had quite ceased. With his knife he cut Cook loose, hoping Mrs. Wartman would not call out, then bound the man afresh and left a length of the lariat depending from his wrists. He readjusted the blindfold securely.

"You stand still, now," he commanded. "I'll keep my eye on you—unless you want to be topped with a bullet, you stand!"

He walked toward the house, and as he approached, the light went out.

"All right," he called quietly. "It's Regan. Don't call out, please."

As he came to the door it was unbarred and opened, and Mrs. Wartman appeared.

"Don't speak," said Regan quickly. "Will you bring a lantern and something for a bandage, and come out to the shed? And keep Peggy where she is."

"I guess I will, her being in bed," was the response. "My land, boy—you hurt?"

"Nope," said Regan, with a trace of a laugh. "Didn't I tell you not to speak, durn it all? I got a man here and don't want him to recognize where he is."

"All right," responded Mrs. Wartman softly, and disappeared.

Regan went back to the shed, past Jed Cook, who stood like a statue. The longer he stood, the better would be served Re-

gan's plans, which depended entirely on a mental campaign. The man would yield to no physical force, but he would yield, he must yield, to the more intangible threat. At first meeting with Cook, Regan had sensed behind that inscrutable horse-face an inner weakness, and he was playing heavily upon it.

Presently Mrs. Wartman appeared with a lantern, came to the shed, and Regan went inside with her. He laid bare his thigh. It was a nasty looking gash.

"Do your best, please," he said. "I've got work ahead. Looks like the blood has stopped, but I can't take chances."

"Looks like the blood has all drained out of you," she exclaimed under her breath. "What's happened, anyhow?"

"Automobile accident, allee same big city," and Regan grinned. "Could you possibly get to Tom Higgins in the morning, first thing?"

"Reckon I could," replied the lady, as she worked.

"Tell him Ole and I are at some old prospector's shack a mile up the trail. By ten in the morning I'll either have won the whole game for Higgins or I'll have lost—it's win or lose big. Tell him to show up any time after ten. I may be laid up with this hurt—"

"My land! Young man, you're bruised all over!" she exclaimed.

"Never mind—so's Jed Cook," and Regan chuckled. "That's him out there. Tell Tom, too, that I guess his car is wrecked for keeps. It's in the creek where the trail turns out for Canoncito Rojo."

Mrs. Wartman looked up at him. "What's that? You mean my car?"

"Your car?" repeated Regan, astonished. "No, I mean Tom's new car."

The lady grunted. "Oh, you do! Then I guess you've got something to learn after all, Red."

"What do you mean?"

She stood up, and the twinkle in her eyes was intensified.

"Never you mind—I don't tell you all I know! If you go up that trail tonight, in the shape you're in, you're a fool."

"Can't go in any other shape," said Regan, and turned to the door. "Thanks a whole lot—and give my love to Peggy."

With a laugh, he walked out to his captive and took the end of the rope binding the wrists of Cook.

"March, now—I'll guide you. We'll take your blindfold off pretty soon."

Afterward, Red Regan never liked to think of that mile of hill trail.

CHAPTER XI

OLE was on guard, as his low trail testified when Regan approached the shack. Regan at once halted his captive, who was still blindfolded.

"Wait a minute, now."

He strode on ahead, and Ole met him.

"No talk," said Regan curtly, "and work fast—I'm about all in. Can we keep a feller in that old prospect hole?"

"No place better."

"Did you make any impression on your friend?"

"Sure did, Red! He's awake and shivering now."

"Go keep him where he can't see, but can hear."

Ole departed. Regan brought along the unhappy and wrathful Jed Cook, until they stood before the shack. The moon, now high, illuminated the place clearly enough. Regan removed the blindfold, and perceived that Cook had no idea of his location, and gave him leave to talk.

"I've had about enough of this!" exclaimed Cook angrily, his voice ringing loudly on the night. "You've no warrant for my arrest, you've no right to act like this, and I demand that—"

"Demand all you durned please, Cook," said Regan cheerfully, "and it'll do you no good. Ain't ready to talk with you yet. Get into that prospect hole over there, and I'll tie your ankles. If you don't like the hotel accommodations, do the other thing. Move fast, now! Or else I'll tie you to a tree out here and leave you."

Cook had no choice. He cursed earnestly and Regan only grinned, well knowing Cal Victor was hearing it all. Cook disappeared in the mouth of the shaft. Following, Regan struck a match, seized Cook and flung him down, then tied his ankles with the loose end of the line. This done, he made his way back and found Ole standing in the moonlight.

"What's happened?" said Ole.

"Tell you tomorrow. Can you stand watch all night?"

"You bet."

"You haven't seen Vaca?"

"Nary a soul."

REGAN turned to the shack, groped his way inside, caught an anxious word from Victor, and told the man to shut up. He dropped to the floor, and was asleep in two minutes. The tired body, after such concentrated excitement, had given in.

Dawn brought movement to the little clearing before the shack and notch in the cliff, and sunrise brought the appetizing odors of bacon and coffee. Ole sat there by his tiny "Injun" fire until breakfast was ready, then summoned Regan. The latter appeared, blinking, limping somewhat, and grimaced at the new day.

"Any water around here?" he asked. Ole stared at him curiously.

"Gosh, what a sight you are—and half your pants gone! Say—"

"Any water around here? Durn you, leave my looks alone!"

"Sure, just around the corner to the left. A spring. Treat it gentle."

In ten minutes Regan was back. He was stiff and sore, and walked with difficulty, but sleep had restored him to himself, and he met Ole's inquiring look with his old cheerful grin. A gesture signified caution.

"You might trot Victor out here, soon's we eat, then go get some sleep."

"Consarn you!" grumbled Ole, but said no more.

Regan fell to work, left enough food to give his captive a bite, but hid this carefully from sight. He borrowed Ole's gun, since his own had been immersed the previous night and he refused to trust it, then sat back and rolled a smoke. Ole went into the shack and after a time Victor appeared, scarcely able to walk as yet.

"Come out and sit down and rest yourself," said Regan. "It does hurt to be tied up all night, huh? You and I will have that talk now. Here's the makin's."

Victor came toward him. There was no fury left in those yellow eyes, as the man seated himself and looked at his captor. Cal Victor was tamed—for the moment.

"Don't I get some grub?" he demanded sullenly, as he tried to roll a smoke with stiff fingers.

"I dunno—do you?" Regan surveyed him happily. "Talk first and eat afterward, feller. What about the money you did me out of down below? I've got a warrant out for you, no mistake about that. Still—"

He paused, and the other struck in swiftly.

"What on earth you got Cook for?"

"None of your business," said Regan. "But I've got him. If you doubt it, go look in the old shaft, yonder. You ain't answered my question yet."

"Oh, I heard him come," said Victor, and relapsed into anxious, frowning silence. At last he looked up. "See here, Regan—I made ten thousand out of that deal with your ranch."

"I lost more'n that," said Regan calmly.

"I know it, but that's what I got. If you'd let me go, I'd turn it over—only I can't."

"You can't pull the wool over my eyes more'n once, hombre," said Regan. "I take you or the money, that's flat! I don't hanker to put anybody in the pen, and I ain't lost that ranch yet—the law's worrying over it more'n I am. If you can put up the money, you can skip. If not, you'll go along and stand trial."

The desperate, almost frantic look in Victor's haggard face astonished him.

"I tell you, I can't!" said Victor sharply. "It's like this. Cook had a scheme he was working at here—"

"I know all about his irrigation scheme," said Regan calmly. "That's blocked."

Victor swore. "Then I'm done, that's all," he said helplessly. "I turned over my money to Cook, every red cent of it! If you don't believe it, examine the papers I had in my pocket. It bought me a little less than half interest in his company."

"Oh!" said Regan thoughtfully. He did not doubt the truth of this. He already knew from those papers that Victor was presumably the entire Solaro Irrigation Company, wherein Cook did not figure.

"I don't get you," he said. "Cook's name don't appear in those papers."

Victor hastened to explain, eagerly enough.

"No, he didn't want to figure. So we left it that I'd be the company, with Vaca acting as a figurehead. Then I made an agreement with Cook, acknowledging that he owned fifty-five per cent of the stock in the company; it was signed and witnessed, and he kept it to make sure I wouldn't double-cross him, I s'pose."

Regan laughed. "And how much do you suppose your company is worth now?"

"Nothing, I reckon." Victor's face darkened. "I felt it wasn't safe, somehow but I done it. And now it ain't worth a durn. How'd you find me, anyhow?"

"Through Cook, indirectly," returned Regan, and it was true enough. An oath dropped from the lips of Victor.

"I thought so! That's what I get for

stickin' with him. I s'pose you're after him for that business down to Mariposa, eh? The insurance game?"

Regan did not respond. He unearthed the remnants of breakfast, gave Victor half that remained, and poured him a cup of coffee.

"Now surround the grub and let me think," he said, and got out Cook's wallet.

His eager expectations were not vain. He soon came upon a folded paper which proved to be the agreement mentioned by Victor. It was duly signed and attested.

"Here's your agreement, all right," said Regan thoughtfully. "Since I can't get my money out of you, I guess I might's well take you along. You may be wanted for the Mariposa deal, anyhow."

"I ain't!" Victor snarled suddenly. "I was in Yuma and can prove it! I don't even know what went wrong in Mariposa, only Cook said a hitch slipped somewhere and he got out of the state and come up here. See here! You gimme that agreement, and then I can make over my stock to you—it'll make you the whole danged company! I got the homestead rights to Eagletail Canyon, anyhow. Vaca made out his to me, and I got the papers—or you have."

"Yes, I have them," said Regan. "I don't know but what that might be a good idea. You can't have the agreement, of course; that sticks with me. Hm! Want to do it?"

"Gimme the chance!" said the other quickly.

"All right. Write me out a deed and indorse the papers. Still got my pencil, I guess."

FOR ten minutes Victor labored earnestly. When he had finished, Regan sent him to wake up Ole. The latter came forth rubbing his eyes.

"Sundown already? Gosh! No—what time is it?"

"Getting on to noon," and Regan grinned. "More or less, that is. Sorry I had to wake you up, Ole. Victor here has assigned me his homestead rights in Eagletail Canyon, and I'd like you to witness the various papers. Then take him and them, and go along to the Wartman place and have Mrs. Wartman witness them. Then go home and wait till I get there. Suit you?"

"Not a danged bit," said Ole. "But I will."

"Then get going."

Twenty minutes later, Regan looked reflectively at the ashes of a paper—the agreement given Cook by Victor—and puffed his cigaret. Those ashes made him the owner of Eagletail Canyon; they did not, however, secure him against the legal retribution of Jed Cook, nor did they secure Colonel Higgins against anything at all. Regan grinned as he came to his feet.

"Anyhow, I got something to go on now, so we'll make fast work of it, win or lose!"

He went to the mine shaft. This was at such a distance from the fire as to make it impossible for Jed Cook to have overheard the previous discussion; he might have caught the murmur of voices, but no more. Regan went in and cut him loose, then emerged.

"Coffee and a strip o' bacon and a doughnut waiting for you, when you're limbered up," he called back, and returned to the fire.

It was another ten minutes before Jed Cook made his appearance, and Regan watched him with interested curiosity. He was not at all the same man he had been twelve hours previously. He still wore his bedraggled black overcoat and his lanky figure was smeared with water-stains. His gimlet eyes were venomous, but the lines of his thin, white horse-face were haggard and wretched. He was painfully rubbing his wrists.

"Don't step on that rattler," said Regan, and the other started. "Come along and get your grub."

"Did I hear Victor's voice?" asked Cook, staring around.

"You sure did." Regan carelessly displayed his deputy's star, without giving the other time to see exactly what it was. "I wanted Victor for trimming me down in Arizona—maybe he mentioned having done a sheriff down there. I'm him, and I got my man, like I most generally do. Friend of mine has got him on his way, now. Real good thing, too."

Jed Cook bent to seat himself, winced, and then relaxed with a groaning sigh.

"Bruised up?" asked Regan lightly. "Nothing broke, anyhow. I had to do it, since you held the gun on me."

"So you decoyed me, did you?" asked the other.

"Yep. Here's your coffee and stuff—set in."

The gimlet eyes bit at him.

"I s'pose you know you've no jurisdiction in this county?"

"I'm a deputy sheriff of this county. Had

a talk with Sheriff Stevens before I saw you last night. Better set in, now. I got some words to say."

Jed Cook, finding himself blocked, and ignorant just how far this amazing red-headed Arizona sheriff was in the right, ate wolfishly. Regan lighted another cigaret, and presently broke into musing speech, almost as though to himself.

"Yes, it sure is right funny how things happen! Here I came up here after Victor, and I run into you! Well, I couldn't get my money out of Victor—right disappointing, too. I'd a durned sight have the money rather than stick anybody in jail, even you. You've cleaned up the ten thousand he took out of me, durn you! Anyhow, his testimony will come in right handy on your case. I'd never suspected he knew anything about that there Mariposa deal."

JED COOK choked on his coffee. "That —that which?" he asked.

Regan looked at him with blank, innocent eyes. "Why, that little flyer in insurance of yours, down to Mariposa! What did you think I was after you for, anyhow?"

The long horse-face went very pale indeed.

"But—but there was nothing in that to justify a warrant! You show me your warrant!"

"You go plumb to hell," said Regan calmly. "I'm running this game, not you. When we get back to town I'll show you warrant enough, and extradition papers, too, soon's I can get them from Santa Fe."

"This will ruin me," said Cook slowly, staring at him.

"I should worry," said Regan, and he was very cheerful about it. "Sure will be fine news down below when they learn you're up here!"

"They—then you're the only one knows it?" asked Cook. Regan nodded.

There was a moment of silence, and Regan left it carefully alone. He could almost read the thoughts passing behind those gimlet eyes.

"Look here," said Cook softly. "Suppose I turned back the ten thousand to you I got from Cal Victor—huh? I don't want to be ruined. If you hadn't blown in here, nobody would ever have suspected I was the man who was in Mariposa—and I'm none too sure they can nail me for anything down there, anyhow. If you got your ten thousand back—huh."

Regan pulled at his dead cigaret for a moment.

"Might be done, I s'pose," he admitted. "Ten thousand is a whole lot more to me than dragging you down below, for a fact. Only—"

"But I got to assure myself!" said the other quickly. "You got to give me a receipt for it. I don't want you going back and then giving me away—doublecrossing me."

Regan quietly got out Jed Cook's wallet, and from it drew a check for ten thousand dollars, given Cook by Cal Victor.

"There you are," he said. "Endorse it to me, and you have your receipt."

Eagerly, Cook seized the check, fumbled in his waistcoat, and brought out a fountain pen. He endorsed the slip of paper, getting Regan's name and initials, and Regan rose to his feet as he blew on the ink to dry it.

"All set," he said, brightly. "Now, then, I guess we can say good-bye—"

His eye caught a movement among the bushes, a glint of metal. Too late! The sharp crack of a pistol smashed out on the morning. Regan threw out one arm, and then went to the earth.

Hernan Vaca broke into the clearing, his swarthy face convulsed with fury.

CHAPTER XII

"I FIXED the gringo!" said Vaca, as he came forward. Exultation replaced the wild rage that had filled his visage. "Good morning, senor!"

Jed Cook was irresolute.

"Where the devil did you come from?" he demanded. "Where's Victor?"

"Si! Where is he?" and Vaca roared an oath. "Do you know what has happened, senor? Last night they have raided our camp, thrown all our cement into the water, driven off our men—and where is Victor? I cannot find him."

"He was here a little while ago."

"Here?" The Mexican started. "You are sure? He is dead?"

Cook shrugged, and coolly inspected the outstretched figure of Regan.

"I think he's gone to jail—I don't know. If I were you, I'd skip out, Hernan! This county is unhealthy, after all."

The two were speaking in Mexican. To one side lay Regan, face down, one arm doubled beneath him, the other flung out. Vaca looked at him, spat, and cursed—then

a quick laugh leaped into his swarthy face and he held up his pistol.

"There, look!" he exclaimed. "Yesterday I shot at rabbits and forgot to reload. All this night I have been in the hills, with just one bullet left. I followed the path here to the smoke—and I used that one bullet! That's the kind of man I am."

"Shut up," said Cook abstractedly. "Take some coffee. Let me think."

He frowned, pulling at his long chin. The situation was not altogether to his liking, and yet he was relieved that Regan was dead, and with him the secret. Then there was the check, which need not be wasted.

"If you need a gun," said Cook, pointing to the pistol which had been laid aside by Regan, "take that one."

Hernan Vaca was more interested in coffee than anything else, gulping it down black and hot. Cook arose stiffly and went to the figure of Regan.

"So now you'll give me back that check after all!" he said, and laughed softly. "I'll put your name to it, and who'll know or care? Not Victor, certainly. I must cash it quickly, too. Fool that I was, not to cash it yesterday!"

He leaned over, to turn Regan's body—then a startled cry broke from him. The body had jerked convulsively; his outstretched arm was caught in a grip of steel, and with this leverage Regan shot to his feet. Overbalanced, Cook staggered, and a fist caught him alongside the jaw, sending him flying headfirst to fall and lie quiet.

What ensued was sharp and swift. Regan was unarmed, and so was Hernan Vaca. The latter dropped his coffee at Cook's cry, and plunged forward to get the pistol lying on the ground. Regan went, not for the pistol, but for the man. They came together above the weapon, and in the scuffle it was swept aside and lost to sight.

With the agility of a snake, Vaca twisted away from Regan, rolled over, and came to his feet. He comprehended that his boasted bullet had missed after all—that Regan had played 'possum to save himself. From his lips poured hot curses, and the blade of his knife flamed in the sunlight. Then Regan was upon him, before he could throw the weapon.

No sooner did they come to grips than Regan perceived himself lost in any physical encounter—he was too weak to cope with this snarling wild beast of a man. His blows snapped home, without force. Vaca tore loose from him, plunged the long blade forward. Regan felt the steel bite against his ribs, glancingly. In a desperate burst of energy, he hurled himself bodily upon Vaca and bore the Mexican backward and down.

THEY came down in a tangled mass and landed on top of Jed Cook.

They fought silently, frantically. Regan felt the knife bite a second time, and his strength flowed back for an instant; he crushed Vaca with blows from fist and knee, doubled up the man, at length got one hand to the throat. Beneath them came a deep and terrible sound, a groan, from the prostrate figure of Cook. A strangled cry burst from Vaca. He tore half free. His knife gone, he flailed Regan with wild fists, dragged himself erect, dragged Regan with him—then Regan's fist caught him and sent him staggering.

The snarling fury of Vaca was changed to wild fear. He plunged for shelter of the trees. Regan tried to follow, but could take only a step or two. Then, unexpectedly, Vaca stopped in mid-career, checked himself abruptly, turned and darted in another direction. Regan thought the man mad—until the sharp crack of a pistol lifted and echoed. Vaca whirled around like a shot rabbit, and fell.

"Reckon I come along just right," boomed the voice of Colonel Higgins, and his burly figure tramped out into the opening. "Gosh, Red! You sure look like hell—"

This was all Regan remembered.

When Regan came to himself, it was with a great and abiding sense of peace. He stared up at the morning sunlight and the trees, and somewhere heard a bird singing, and wondered what it was all about. Then he recollected.

With an effort, he forced himself to sit up, found that he was near the shack, and sat back against the wall. Colonel Higgins was beside him at once. Across the clearing he saw the figure of Ole busy at something. Higgins sat down, grinned, and rolled a smoke, while Regan glanced down at the bandages decorating his half-naked body.

"Knives do cut, I reckon," he observed whimsically. "Glad you showed up, Tom. Did he get me bad?"

"Hell, no," returned the other. "You're too durned tough in the hide to be hurt much. Scraped around your ribs a couple o' times, that's all."

"Give me that cigaret—thanks. Dog-gone you, I got you where I want you, now!"

"How come?" demanded Higgins.

Regan grinned. "I'm the legal owner of Eagletail Canyon, savvy? And I've got back ten thousand from the wreck down below. I'm going to build me a dam across the canyon and build me a house beside the dam, and anytime you get too uppity, I'll cut off your crick water."

"Oh!" said Higgins. "How much you want for that there canyon?"

"Ain't for sale. Did you see Victor?"

"Uh-huh. Done met him and Ole. Let him go along. Going to build you a house, are you? Aiming to live there all alone?"

The two looked at each other, and it was a look of perfect comprehension.

"I reckon not," said Regan. "Peggy Wartman's coming to live with me."

"Huh? Does she know it yet?"

Regan puffed at his cigaret, reflectively.

"Well, I sort of imagine she does," he made answer. "I haven't settled it yet in so many words, but you know, Tom, lots of times a body don't need words! So far's I'm concerned, it's done settled."

Colonel Higgins rumbled out a laugh.

"Then I guess you win! Right smart little place, Wartman's, ain't it? Now look here, I can use that there Eagletail a durned sight better'n you can, Red. Let's us fix up a deal for it."

"What sort of a deal you aiming at?" demanded Regan cheerfully. He had no intention of keeping the canyon, as Colonel Higgins knew perfectly well.

"Why, an even swap! I'll give you a right pretty little property, worth some money too, and a fine house already built for you to start housekeeping in, and everything all serene. What say?"

"Where's all this property?" asked Regan.

"Down yonder—Wartman Canyon."

"Nothing there but the Wartman place."

"That's it."

Regan stared for a moment, in puzzled frown.

"You mean, you'll give me the Wartman place? What you talking about? It isn't yours to give. By the way, Mrs. Wartman made a queer crack I didn't get wise to, about your new Cadrack car being her car—"

Colonel Higgins' huge frame was shaken by laughter. It began at his eyes and went all over him, until he was shaking in wild mirth, while Regan could only stare blankly at him and wonder what it all meant.

"Red, you're the limit!" said the big rancher at last. "Dog-gone your dirty hide. I sure have laid one over on you! Why, that there car was my wedding present to the lady, savvy? We've done been married a month, only we didn't want a soul to know it until all this fuss was over—"

"Married!" cried Regan. "You married? You and Mrs. Wartman?"

"Ain't no Mrs. Wartman no more, durn you!"

"Bully for you, Tom!" Regan put out his hand and it was caught in a crushing grip. He winced. "Dang it all, remember I'm a sick man! Let's go see Peggy."

"What? Without no pants hardly?"

"Gosh!" Regan glanced down at himself, and sank back. Then he looked up. "Hey, Ole! Come over here!"

"Leave him alone," said Colonel Higgins. "He's busy. I reckon he can swap pants with you soon's he's done."

"What's he doing, then? By the way—you'd better let Cook go—huh? What is it?"

"Why, Cook's plumb gone, Red."

"Gone?"

Colonel Higgins looked sober, and nodded.

"Yep. Me and Ole seen it all. When you and the greaser come down on top of Jed Cook, you were struggling around there like two wildcats. Anyhow, Vaca done put his knife right into Cook—got him in the gizzard. He's dead as 'lasses. That's howcome I plugged Vaca for keeps, to finish things off. Ole's laying Cook where he'll keep until the coroner can come along."

REGAN sat silent. He remembered the one terrible groan that had escaped the senseless figure beneath them, and lifting his hand, he wiped sweat from his brow.

"Gosh!" he said slowly. "Tom, I guess I'm a fast worker, all right—too durned fast for any use! I'll take you up on that swap—if Peggy agrees."

"All right, let's go ask her," and Higgins plunged to his feet.

"Nope," exclaimed Regan hurriedly. "Hold on, now—"

"Oh, shut up!" and Higgins grinned down at him. "Lost your nerve all of a sudden, you fast worker? Hey, Ole! Come over here and swap pants with Red! He's going courting!"

"I'm not!" yelled Regan.

"Durn you, you are!" said Tom Higgins.

And Higgins won.

He brought the stool down with a whack across the gunman's wrist.

BUZZARDS DON'T USE BULLETS

by JAMES ROURKE

THE HEAVY, silver-gray sedan squealed to a sudden stop. Its driver was forced sharply to apply his brakes in order to avoid hitting the figure which had leaped into the center of the mountain highway, arms waving.

As soon as the machine had halted, the owner of the arms came toward it. Though on foot, various features of his garb, the leather chaps, plaid shirt, high-heeled boots, beaver hat, bespoke the horseman. When he discovered the driver of the sedan shared the front seat with a very pretty girl he pulled off his beaver and uncovered a

---

They had tangled the girl and her brother in the murder-mesh of a satan-spawned renegade legion—and nothing could save them but the trigger magic of Speck Brown—and a prayer!

young, much-freckled and rather impudently cheerful face.

"Excuse me, folks," he smiled at the pair in the car, "but I reckon I got tuh ask yuh tuh ride me a ways. Lost my horse back in the hills a while ago. I was plum' worried till I heard yuhr buzz-wagon rambling along, and soundin' like a chariot o' hope."

"H'm!" crisply commented the young man at the wheel. "You mean to say you are a cowboy who has been accidentally deprived of his mount? You want to return to your home ranch—is that it?"

"Well, not exactly," came the somewhat enigmatical rejoinder, "but I'm right anxious tuh be goin' where I'm goin'. Mebbe I'd better introduce me. The name's Brown —'Speck' Brown. Address at present, State o' Montana."

"All right, Mr. Brown; get in," invited the driver of the auto. "This is Miss Walton, and I am—"

"Huh?" abruptly cut in the other. "Yuh ain't the daughter o' old Ira Walton, o' the Box IW, near Range City?"

The lips of the very pretty girl parted in a smile which made her even prettier.

"Yes, I'm Glenna Walton, and my father owns the Box IW. Surely you aren't one of daddy's hands? I've been East for two years and I suppose the ranch has changed a lot."

"Pleased tuh meet yuh, Miss Walton." In Speck Brown's eyes gleamed a peculiar twinkle. "No, I ain't a Box IW hand, but I've met Ira Walton a number o' times."

"Perhaps you know my brother Glen?" the girl continued.

"No, I ain't yet had that pleasure," answered Mr. Brown, just a bit queerly.

Glenna Walton turned to her companion.

"I might as well finish the introduction, Putty. Mr. Brown, meet Putnam Revere, of Boston, who is going to spend the summer at our ranch. It's his first trip West."

Speck had been sizing up the driver of the sedan. The latter was attired in golf tweeds and a sport shirt. His upper lip was adorned with a neatly trimmed, small black mustache. Neither he nor his silver-gray car seemed to fit in very well with the rugged surroundings.

"Howdy, Revere!" A touch of mischief lighted the freckled visage as Speck shook hands. "Reckon I read about one o' yuhr family back in school. He sat a right wicked saddle!"

"I don't mind admitting I'm a descendant of Paul Revere," said the Bostonian. "However, he and I differ in our modes of transportation."

"You say you lost a horse in the hills, Mr. Brown?" Glenna Walton inquired as Speck found a seat amid the luggage piled in the rear of the machine.

"Yes, Miss Walton." His grin died away. "I was pushin' hard on the reins and old Pete stumbled on a rocky trail. Busted both front legs when he fell. Left me only one thing tuh do. But I sure hated tuh shoot that Pete horse!"

"Oh, I'm sorry!" the girl murmured sympathetically. Putnam Revere started the sedan.

"I s'pose yuh were headin' for Range City and the Box IW?" queried Speck Brown.

"Were?" said the Bostonian. "We are!"

"But that ain't where I want tuh go," mildly objected the passenger.

"Well, where are you bound? Do you expect us to go out of our way to take you there?" Putnam Revere glanced around in some irritation.

"I reckon mebbe yuh would." Speck's tone continued milk. "I gotta get tuh Oilopolis this afternoon. Yuh take the next road downgrade tuh yuhr left."

"Oilopolis?" expressed the Bostonian.

"I never heard of any place by that name!" said Glenna Walton.

"Usta be called Black Basin till about a year ago," Speck Brown explained. "Then some jasper struck oil and boom hit the burg. First thing they did was rename the town Oilopolis. Yes, old Black Basin has changed consid'able!"

"Black Basin? But Black Basin must be all of thirty miles away!" cried the girl. "And Range City is fully as far in the other direction. Oh, we can't do it, Putty!"

Revere slowed down the motor.

"You've heard the verdict, old man?" he said. "We can't go fifty or sixty miles out of our way to oblige you. It's quite unreasonable to expect it."

"As long as you haven't a horse we'll be glad to take you with us to Range City, though," offered the girl.

"I got right important business in Oilopolis," stubbornly persisted the freckled one. "That left turn is just ahead. Reckon yuh better take it,"

"Now, look here!" angrily exploded the sedan's driver.

"I ain't got no time tuh argue, neither! I'm goin' tuh Oilopolis and goin' pronto!

In case yuh don't believe it, I got six soft-nosed babies here who'll be right glad tuh do some convincin'. Throw that wheel around!"

A STEELY snap had entered the voice of Speck Brown, and in his right hand had appeared magically the grim, triggered container holding those "six soft-nosed babies." Putnam Revere had forgotten he was in a country where men usually go armed. And he realized his passenger was in deadly earnest. The silver-gray sedan rolled down the road and turned to the left.

Glenna Walton was indignant. Her pretty cheeks flushed hotly, her blue eyes flashed fire.

"You're no better than an outlaw!" she cried. "I don't believe you lost your horse at all!"

"May my trigger finger drop off if I didn't give yuh the gospel truth about old Pete, Miss Walton! He's done gone where the good broncs go. I had tuh raise a ride somehow!"

"If there are any officers of the law in Oilopolis I'll see to it you get your just deserts when we arrive!" vowed Putnam Revere.

"Don't yuh worry about nothin' now except gettin' there," coldly remarked Speck Brown. "And I wouldn't go tuh botherin' the marshal at Oilopolis with trifles. He's got enough man-sized troubles tuh deal with."

"At any rate, my father shall hear of your conduct, Mr. Brown—if that's your name!" said Ira Walton's daughter.

"Sure! Yuh tell him!" Speck grinned in sudden enjoyment. "I reckon yuh ain't gonna be able tuh reach the Box IW till dark now, but mebbe yuhr daddy won't mind when he hears why yuh was delayed, Miss Walton."

Exasperated by the man's cheerfulness, the girl flounced around in the seat and nestled close to Revere. She missed the grimace Speck gave at her action.

It was late in the afternoon when Oilopolis was reached. The former sleepy village of Black Basin, which Glenna Walton could dimly recall, had been metamorphosed into a raw, greasy, smelly and wholly characteristic "oil town." Derricks dotted the horizon in every direction; many crude new buildings had been thrown up along the main street of the place.

THE silver-gray sedan and its occupants drew interested gazes as the big car swayed down the rutty thoroughfare. Speck Brown compressed his lips.

"Here's the Palace Hotel; I'll be gettin' out," he said. "Yuh'll find the Palace a right nice place if yuh want tuh freshen up before hittin' for Range City, Miss Walton," he added. "I wouldn't linger too long in Oilopolis. Like all these kinda burgs, it's plum' rough and hard-cooked. I simply had to get here this afternoon or I wouldn't have made yuh come so far outa yuhr road."

His tone was mild and apologetic, but there was little forgiveness in the look the girl bestowed upon him.

"Perhaps you'd better rest in the hotel a few minutes, Glenna," observed Putnam Revere. "I'm nearly out of gas and will have to look around for some."

Speck Brown clambered out of the car.

"Well, good-day, folks; much obliged for the lift." He bowed impishly.

"Just a moment, please," Revere requested, somewhat grimly. He, too, stepped from the car. Speck noted, now the Bostonian was all straightened out, that he was a well-knit sixfooter, fairly broad of shoulder.

"Some day," Putnam Revere continued, "I'm going to pay you off, you freckled outlaw! You've one gun the better of me at present, and I can't very well brawl in front of my fiancee, Miss Walton. I hope the opportunity will come, though, to settle this score."

His late passenger eyed him with a trace of amusement.

"Them's right noble words, Revere," he said, "but I wouldn't go buildin' up no ambitious idees. When I get riled I'm rough, and apt tuh be death on dudes. I reckon it's wisest tuh leave men's work tuh men!"

Turning then on his heel, Speck sauntered down the street. Putnam Revere glared at his plaid back a long moment before assisting Glenna Walton out of the sedan and into the ornate lobby of the Palace Hotel.

A scowl soon replaced the grin on Speck Brown's visage as he clumped along the new board sidewalk.

"Hell!" he muttered. "Old Ira's daughter, prettier'n a mountain dawn—and engaged tuh a dude in prairie shinny pants she calls Putty! Reckon that's what he is. A big, soft lump o' putty!"

Presently he arrived in front of a sprawl-

ing one-story structure bearing over the wide doors the legend: "No Limit House." With an effort he restored his grin and entered the place.

Thirsty customers crowded a long bar at one side where dubious drinks were being served rapidly. A piano in the rear was playing and hard-featured men danced over a rough floor with equally hard-featured feminines. Many gambling games were in evidence; everything from poker to faro seemed on tap.

For several seconds Speck Brown surveyed the gaming tables. Finally his eyes came to rest upon a corner where five players were sitting in a session of stud poker. He strolled over slowly.

One of the quintet was a houseman. Three others wore the garb of the oil fields, and were of varying ages. The fifth player was a young man in conventional dress. With his fair hair and blue eyes he bore an unmistakable resemblance to the pretty daughter of Ira Walton.

It was plain this young man had been sampling liberally of the illegal beverages dispensed openly in the No Limit. He could scarcely handle his cards.

Coming up casually, Speck Brown slapped his shoulder with affected heartiness.

"Why, hello, Glen!" he greeted. "The old kid hisself! Ain't seen yuh in a month o' blue Mondays!"

"H'lo!" responded the other, thickly and a bit uncertainly.

"Gosh, yuh ain't forgot yuhr old sidekick, Speck Brown, have yuh, Glen? Many's the bottle o' hooch we split together!"

"You're dealing, Walton!" cut in the man on the left. He was a smooth shaven, heavy-set individual in the get-up of an oilman. Apparently forty or fifty years of age, his face bore the marks of hard, fast living The gaze he bestowed upon Speck was cold and unfriendly.

At this juncture the youngest player in the group pushed back his chair. He was a narrow-faced, mean-eyed chap of nineteen or twenty.

INSTANTLY Speck was around the table.

"Quittin', pardner?" he assumed jovially, taking hold of the chair. "Reckon I may's well sit in with Glen and the boys."

"Get the hell away from that chair and mind yuhr own damn business!" suddenly snarled the narrow-visaged one. "No, I ain't quittin'! I'm just gonna get a pack o' smokes, and it's a helluva note if I—"

"Plum' unmannerly jasper, ain't yuh?" softly interrupted Speck. "I reckon yuh're quittin' all right, son. If I'd time I'd wash yuhr mouth out with soap, but seein' as I ain't mebbe this'll do the trick."

Quickly his right hand shot out, seized the other by the scruff of the neck and shook him violently. Then he whirled him away with such force that the victim spilled to the ground.

"Damn yuh tuh hell!" choked the youth, regaining his knees. One hand clawed toward his hip.

"Stop that reachin', or the undertakers'll be makin' some easy money!" Speck's gun whipped out, covered the other. "Reckon yuh better be travelin' pronto, sonny; I might get real riled in a minute!"

Under the menace of that tone the narrow-faced youth slunk out of the No Limit. As Speck was restoring his six-shooter he caught sight of a big, hulking fellow with heavy, brutal features, scrutinizing him intently.

"Well?" he snapped, in a steel-cold tone.

The big fellow glowered and turned away. In a moment all excitement had died down. Combat was not infrequent in the No Limit House.

Nobody objected further when Speck Brown took the vacated chair at the table. Cards were dealt him and soon the man whose alleged "important business" had forced Putnam Revere and Glenna Walton many miles out of their way was engrossed in the technicalities of the ordinary stud-poker game.

The stakes were fairly high, but Speck appeared well supplied with money. He won a little on some hands, lost a little on others. He kept Glen Walton constantly engaged in talk, yet was always secretly watching the middle-aged individual at the left of Glenna's brother. It did not escape him that the big, hulking fellow with the brutal features hovered close to this man's chair.

At the end of an hour's gambling Speck Brown tossed away his cards.

"The house is winnin' all the coin!" he complained. "I reckon I'll pull out. Come on, Glen; I know a joint where we can get some real bonded stuff. What yuh say?"

"Awri, Speck; lead me to it!" Glen Walton struggled to his feet. "I'm tired o' stud, anyhow!"

The man at his left looked annoyed, even alarmed.

"Where are you going, Walton? Mac is liable to be back any minute, and we—"

"No, I'm gonna along wi' Speck!" stubbornly insisted the fair young man. "M' old fren' Speck! See you t'night, Keever, when Mac gets back. C'mon there, Speck, old Specky-Speck!"

"Right with yuh, Glen!" grinned the freckled one, taking no heed of the malevolent glances vouchsafed him by Keever. With Ira Walton's son hanging to his arm, he led the way out of the boisterous No Limit.

"Mark Keever's a good fellow, Speck," young Walton mumbled. "Good fellow, but he wants me to hang around alla time. O' course, him and Mac's gonna help me make a lotta money in oil, Speck. A lotta money!"

"Oh, yes! Him and Mac!" Speck expressed, queerly. "Now, ain't that funny? I reckon I'd never taken Keever for a big-hearted hombre!"

"That's ri—big-hearted'" The other caught at the word. "Say, where's this place we're going, Speck?"

"Down the street a ways," evasively, "so yuh got a deal on with Keever and Mac, Glen? Tell me—"

"D'you know, Speck," Glen interrupted, "I can't seem to 'member where we met before? D'you work for the old man?"

"Why, Glen, I—hell's hinges!"

Savagely Speck Brown bit off the final phrase. The pair had turned a corner and encountered the girl Speck had thought far on the way to Range City and the Box IW by this time!

GLENNA WALTON gave a startled exclamation at sight of her brother.

"Glen!" escaped her.

"Well, if it ain't my sis! H'lo, Glenna! Thought you were a thousand miles away. What you doing here?"

"I didn't come here willingly," she snapped, eyeing Speck Brown hard, "but perhaps it was a good thing, after all. You've been drinking, Glen. Keeping bad company again, aren't you? You know daddy—"

"That's ri—pick on me, too!" young Walton reproached. "Ain't seen you for two years and first thing you do is start scolding! What you think o' that, Speck? D'you know my sister, Speck?"

"I've met Mr. Brown, Glen," coldly. "I was under the impression, however, he didn't know you. I wonder, Mr. Brown, if you would mind explaining—everything?"

"Reckon I ain't able tuh explain nothin' now, Miss Walton," answered Speck. "How come yuh ain't headed for home?"

"Because Mr. Revere ran out of gas, and the only garage in town is likewise out until tomorrow!" she flashed. "Therefore, we are forced to remain here over night! Glen, I want you come to the hotel with me."

"No, Speck and me—"

"Yuh go along with her, Glen" hurriedly put in Speck. "I just recollected a date I gotta keep. Mebbe I'll see yuh later. S' long, Miss Walton. Sorry Revere ran outa gas. Reckon that's where old Paul had it on him."

Before the girl's befuddled brother could object the sun-spotted young man was rapidly going back the way he had come. Nor did he glance around until out of sight.

"Here, you!"

A harsh voice cut into Speck Brown's deep meditations. He glanced up to face the oilman, Markham Keever. The hard countenance was threatening, unpleasant.

Accompanying Keever was the big, hulking individual Speck had noted in the No Limit House.

"Was yuh addressin' me?" coolly inquired the freckled chap.

"I was!" the oilman growled. "Where's young Walton?"

"Don't bark at me!" warned Speck Brown. "Anyway, why should I have tuh tell yuh where he is?"

Keever's face grew more sinister.

"I don't know what your game is, my freckled friend," he uttered ominously, "but let me tell you it ain't healthy to fool around with Mark Keever! I'd advise you to hit the trail out of Oilopolis while the hitting's good, or you'll be damn sorry!"

During the latter part of his speech his brute-appearing companion had stepped closer.

Speck had listened to Keever with a faint grin, but now his expression changed.

"Tell that jasper with the ugly mug tuh stop right where he is!" he shot out. "There ain't no need of a third party tuh this discussion!"

Markham Keever laughed unpleasantly.

"It takes a damn good man to give orders to Roughhouse Hegley," he jeered.

"Go on, Roughhouse, and show him—"

The next instant a steel pistol barrel had jabbed into the big fellow's stomach with such emphasis he grunted in pain. He also stopped quickly.

"Reckon yuh've found yuhr damn good man, Keever!" Speck Brown voiced, in a quiet yet terrible tone. "Mebbe yuh galoots oughta run along now. I'm gettin' riled, and I'm plum' rough when riled. Shake it up while the shakin' is good!"

Markham Keever backed away, his features twisting with hate.

"Come on, Roughhouse!" he ordered. "We'll get him some other time!"

"I reckon that gettin' won't be all one-sided," observed Speck, and he grinned again. "Pick 'em up and lay 'em right down now!"

The discomfited duo departed, "Roughhouse" Hegley grumbling and clinching his ham-like hands, Keever sullen and dangerous.

Until darkness set in, Speck Brown was mysteriously busy. Most of the time he spent in a local recording office, studying up on the joint holdings of Markham Keever and one Louis McCorrie—an as yet unproductive oil property known to the district as the "Twin Giant Oil Company."

"Reckon I know all I need tuh," he muttered at last.

THE freckled chap consumed a supper of sirloin steak and fried potatoes with satisfied gusto and after the meal fared forth again. This time he headed toward the Palace Hotel.

Although early in the evening, the night life of the town had commenced. Oilfield workers had come in for relaxation and were thronging the bars and dance halls. A wild night was in prospect; indeed, all Oilopolis nights were wild.

When almost at the door of the gaudy Palace, Speck Brown met Putnam Revere. The Bostonian halted him.

"Miss Walton's brother has vanished, and she's much upset," he said grimly. "You appear to know a good deal of Glen's affairs. Do you know where he is?"

"Don't try to get hard-cooked," advised Speck. "Yuh say Glen's gone? Why, I come here lookin' for him!"

"He disappeared after dinner. He kept insisting he had a business engagement somewhere tonight, and Glenna couldn't get his mind off it. She's deeply worried. The young ass was left a sizeable fortune by his mother over which the father has no control and—but that's enough. I don't know whether you are really Glen's friend, or otherwise."

"I'm the friend o' Ira Walton, Revere," steadily. "Mebbe I can find Glen. Reckon I'll run out tuh Twin Giant Oil Company right pronto!"

"Where?" the Easterner cried eagerly. "I'll go with you!"

"Yuh stay here and take care o' Miss Walton; this burg ain't no place for a unprotected girl!" Speck snapped. "Besides, yuh'd prob'ly be in the way where I'm goin'. I reckon it won't be no place for a dude. Tell Miss Walton not tuh worry—old Ira's son'll be looked out for."

He plunged away from the Palace Hotel leaving Putnam Revere with an oddly disappointed expression on his face.

A mile tramp was ahead of Speck Brown; his recent investigation had determined the location of the Twin Giant holdings. As he made his way through the country of derricks he loosened the six-shooter he hadn't neglected to bring.

No derricks pointed skyward from the Keever-McCorrie property. A long shack of new lumber was all the place boasted. Speck saw a light in a window.

Boldly the freckled chap walked to the entrance of the crude building and kicked open the door. Hand on gun, he crossed the threshold.

The four occupants of the long room leaped to their feet at his appearance. Three of them, Glen Walton, Markham Keever and a small dark person who doubtless was Louis McCorrie, had been grouped around a rough table on which was scattered a handful of papers, as well as several squat bottles. The fourth man, Roughhouse Hegley, had been seated a little further back.

"Sit down!" Speck's weapon covered the gathering. "Ain't signed any papers yet, have yuh, Glen? Well, I reckon yuh won't now!"

"What the hell do you mean by forcing your way in here?" cried Keever. "Get out, or by God—"

"Ain't I cautioned yuh about barkin' at me?" cut in Speck. "I'm plum' interested in big deals like this, gents. I surmise yuh were about tuh give Glen a third holdin' in the Twin Giant for twenty thousand dollars he happens tuh have. Huh?"

"That's our affair, I think," said McCorrie icily.

"What d'you mean by treatin' m' frens like this, Speck?" added Glen Walton.

"Why, yuh see, Glen, the Twin Giant ain't worth twenty cents, let alone twenty thousand dollars! Yuhr friends is nothin' but a bunch o' swindlin' crooks!"

"Damn you!" grated Keever.

"I wouldn't believe a word you say, you dirty liar!" Glen suddenly burst. "Glenna told me all about what you done today!"

With these last words, he flung himself at Speck's gun hand.

This brief interval sufficed to serve the purpose of Roughhouse Hegley. Grabbing up his stool, the big fellow hurled it at Speck's head. The latter threw up his right arm to block the heavy projectile. Something snapped in his forearm. The six-shooter dropped from his fingers.

Markham Keever lunged at him. Speck gritted his teeth and swung his left fist in the oilman's face. The next instant they grappled, and swayed to the floor.

Then Glen Walton saw Roughhouse Hegley approach the combatants with a murderous snarl on his features; some impulse prompted him to trip the big fellow. The overgrown brute fell violently.

None of the engrossed quintet had heard a flivver pant to a stop outside. Just as Hegley had regained his feet a figure loomed up in the doorway. It was a figure in golf tweeds and sport shirt.

It was Putnam Revere. A single cat-like spring, and he downed the amazed Hegley in a perfect flying tackle.

Wriggling loose, the Bostonian saw Keever attempting to pin down the half-helpless Speck while he groped for his gun on the floor. Revere's foot shot out swiftly. A hard leather toe caught the oil man under the chin. Immediately Markham Keever lost all interest in the surroundings.

Speck essayed a feeble grin.

"I ain't sayin' yuh wasn't welcomer than all the flowers May ever had," he uttered, "but how did yuh get here?"

"Had an idea trouble was brewing," the Bostonian answered defiantly. "Told Glenna I was going out to this Twin Giant place, and she agreed I should. Borrowed a flivver and here I am. While I don't know what it's all about, I hope I've helped."

"By golly, when it comes tuh night rides and rescues yuh gotta hand it tuh the Reveres!" Speck averred. "I reckon yuh've paid me off, and I'll take back all I chirped about dudes. Man, yuh can battle!"

"I played football at Harvard, boxed, and was a sub on the crew," smiled Putnam Revere. "But who are these ruffians, anyway?"

"Just three crooked hombres who made up the Twin Giant Oil Company—with some land and no oil. Glen thought they was his friends, but mebbe he's learned better now."

"I've been a chump!" Young Walton hung his head.

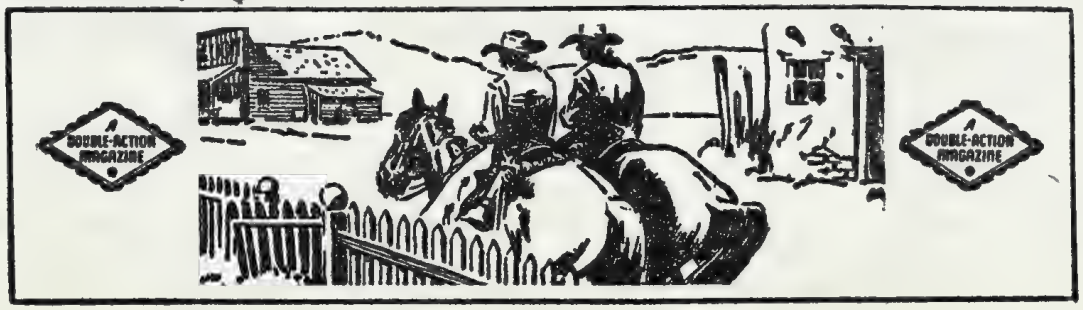
"Oh, a busted arm'll soon mend! I wonder, boys, if yuh'll help me convey this precious gang tuh the Oilopolis caboose. Yuh see, while I'm an old friend o' Ira Walton's, I was already after Keever's crowd. My name ain't really Speck Brown. It's Johnny Buckhart, and I work for Uncle Samuel. Federal authorities have wanted these jaspers quite a spell."

"I was in a hurry tuh get here tuhday, for I'd heard Keever was gettin' set tuh vamoose. And I knew he'd want tuh take Glen's money when he went. I had tuh raise a ride here, yuh see—and I did. Mebbe I am glad yuh run outa gas, too! Otherwise I'd paid heavy for playin' a lone hand with this bunch!"

"My little tin car should hold your men, Speck—and I'll gladly help a federal officer. Of course I'm a bit anxious to return to Miss Walton and assure her all has turned out well."

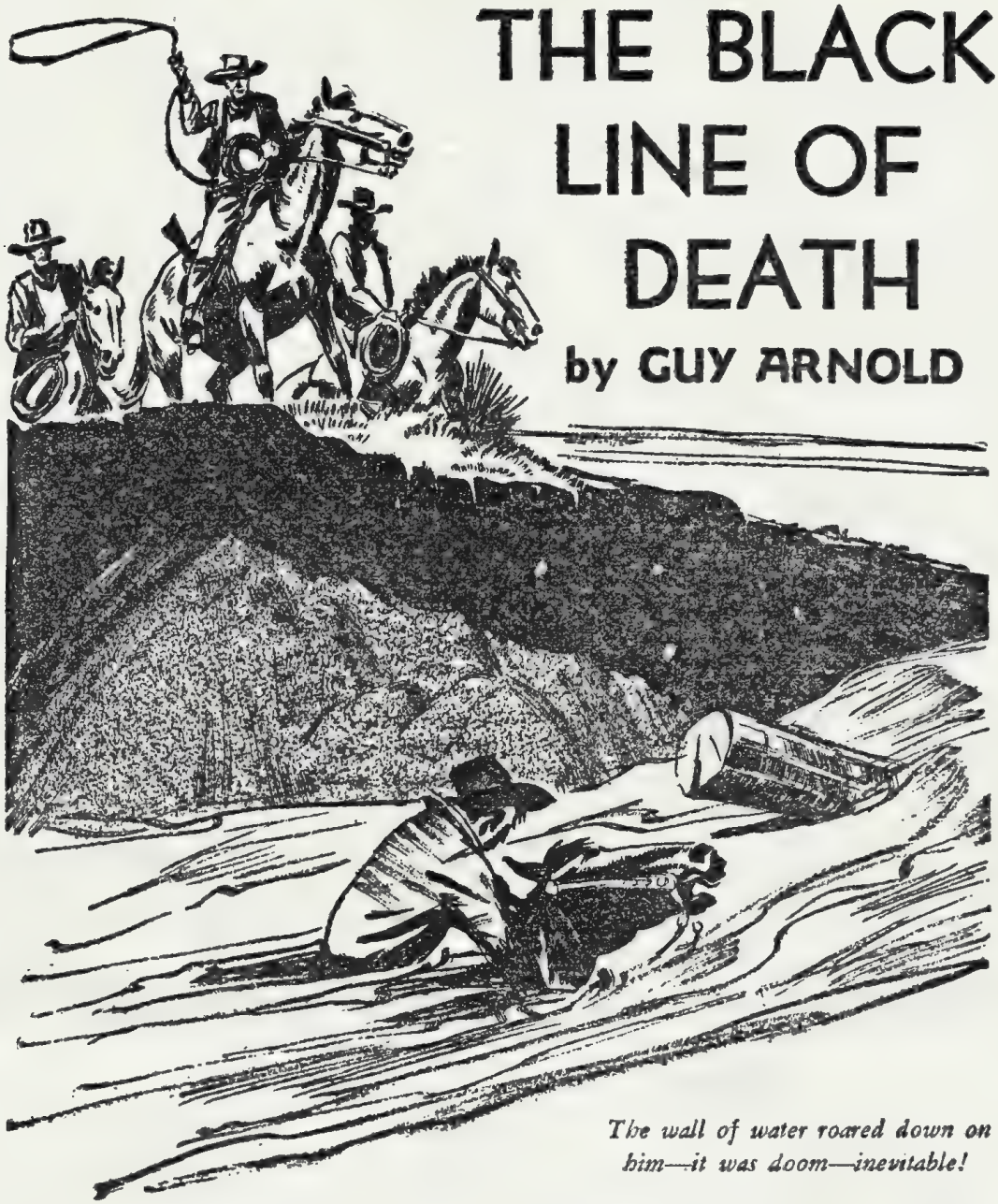
SPECK BROWN, alias Johnny Buckhart, hid a small sigh.

"I reckon she picked right well, even if she did bring back a dude, Revere. But do me a favor. Tell her not tuh call yuh Putty no more. Yuh ain't the least mite soft!"



THE BLACK LINE OF DEATH

by GUY ARNOLD



The wall of water roared down on him—it was doom—inevitable!

AT EACH measured footfall of his horse water squelched. On his hat and slicker came the light beat of thinly falling rain. Apart from these lesser sounds, not interfering with them, a faint high pitched hum cut steadily through the heavy air. Bill Brown of the 44 outfit was riding down the draw to see about the depth of water in the South Fork.

On the plains at the head of the draw a mile back the 44's had been camped for a week. It had been raining when they got there and had been raining ever since. They were on trail with sixteen hundred head of Hereford cattle, bound for Dodge City. South Fork had been pretty high. They had been waiting, hoping it would run down.

But it was ten days yet to Dodge City.

His arm broken on the wild ride he made to save his pardners and the herd, Bill Brown nevertheless gambled with the speeding black line of death—and with the thwarted rage of a kill-crazy gun-hand!

In ten days now their time for getting the herd would be up, and no if's or but's about it. Today they either had to fish or cut bait—try the crossing or turn round and go home.

Therefore it was up to Bill, man in line for trail boss of the 44's, to make very sure of the condition of the crossing. The responsibility of that—though he knew the full strain of it—he had learned to shoulder cheerfully. And the danger connected with it, he had learned to face without hesitation. For a long time Bill had been man in line for trail boss of the 44's. And he was a patient fellow anyhow. Indeed, in the years back when Bill had been for some time man in line for trail boss, another fellow had been boosted over his head. Being a patient simple man he had stood for it and stayed on.

Theoretically there is something outstanding, a touch of the sublime in a fellow who can do that. Practically there is nothing of the sort. The world is crowded with patient worthy fellows who are always pushed aside. Theirs are the truly heavy burdens. Their heads are weak but their backs are strong. They are the useful men.

And Bill, as he rode along, looked that part—just a sturdy plain faced chap, cased to his chin in a faded yellow slicker, his drooped hat brim dripping with the rain, his big square hands clasped on his saddle horn with fingers puffy and red from days of soaking; a sky of lead above him; in his ears the steady high pitched hum that meant his business and his danger.

Presently the rather wide flat of the draw ended in the wider flat of the valley of the South Fork. On the other side, half a mile away, rose high bluffs, dark, sheer and forbidding through the rain. Across the middle of the flat ran the South Fork, a very shallow channel three hundred yards wide. The sodden sandy bank on the other side was so low that in the distance it seemed barely to rise above the water. The water, wimpling under the rain, was yellow. It glided so smoothly over its sandy bed that it seemed to have no current. But the faint singing hum above it told of tremendous speed.

He had hoped he could tell his boss, Tom Becker, that the crossing might be undertaken. The 44's needed the money for that herd. And it might go pretty hard with Tom if the latter had to turn around and take the cattle home. For the truth was there had been only a foot of water on the crossing the first day and second of their layover. It wouldn't have been especially dangerous for anything but a few tail steers who had played out and might have been lost anyhow, there or further on. But Tom had insisted on saving those tailers. That misguided effort to make a record drive now might turn out a pretty bad deal for Tom. He might get let out. That of course would mean Bill's long delayed promotion.

It never occurred to simple Bill that he might lie to Tom about the flood, scare Tom out of trying to cross and thus perhaps greatly better himself. He was just a plain straightforward man.

WHEN he reached the crossing, which was marked only by a wagon way cut down through the low sandy bank, he dismounted and pulled off his boots. Before he could be sure of the safety of the ford he would have to cross himself. If anything happened out there in that wide stretch of singing water to tear him loose from his horse there might be a little chance for him if he had his boots off. With them on there would be no chance. The yellow water was full of sand. The sand, instantly packing in a man's bootlegs clean to the tops, would weigh him down too heavily to swim or even wade. At best it was always a little doubtful, for the first man over.

Having tied his boots together and flung them over the saddle horn, he remounted. Then after carefully scanning the water surface, which all the way across showed no sign of troughing current that would have meant a cutting or a hole on the bottom, he cupped his hand to his left ear and sat listening intently. He didn't want to run the chance of getting caught out there by a wall rise.

But above the singing he caught no other sound. Hopefully he took down his hand, looked at the ford again, then at his watch, and urged his horse.

The horse, a big stout sorrel, crow-hopped a little in the wagon cut and then carefully let himself down. The water was a pretty bad depth for South Fork. It struck the sorrel a little above his knees. It was real work for him to lift and plant his feet in that yellow sluice. In a hundred yards he was panting heavily. But he was a stout horse and he made it at last without a bobble, though he tottered a little when he

finally had climbed up the further bank.

Bill looked at his watch again. He had been eight minutes making that three hundred yards. For cattle, because they crowded each other heavily, that meant too dangerous going. If one should lose his feet he would never gain them again in such water. His rolling body might knock down a dozen other cattle. If that happened, every brute behind would turn downstearm and every brute which did that would be lost.

In the channel a mile below were great deep potholes. In times of flood these became whirlpools. Everything that came down the river was swept into them. Trees, fence posts and the like, all a-tangle with the barbed wire of channel fences from above, swirled round and round in those big holse. No living thing ever came out of them.

Bill's face fell as he looked down at the lather on the jaw of his horse. He hated to go back and tell Tom what he would have to tell him.

Dismounting, he stood with arms folded. After twenty minutes the sorrel had rested and was in shape to go back. Bill hoisted himself into the saddle, then pausing just on the brink, he again cupped hand to ear and listened with strained attention.

It was sure death to be caught out there by a wall rise; and in the valley, which had many bends above, the sound often didn't get down much ahead of the wall itself.

But hearing no sound other than the swift singing of the sand laden sluiceway in front of him, he put the sorrel in. The animal recrossed slowly but with never a sign of faltering. He was a mighty good horse.

On the bank, Bill got down, wiped the sand off his socks, and tugged into his boots. Then after his mount had rested he rode back up the sodden valley toward the draw. He rode slowly; with the news he had there was no reason for hurrying.

THIS was going to be a mighty tough deal on the 44's. When the herd finally got back to the ranch old Jim Bradley, the manager, would be spitting fire and brimstone. Bill felt sorry for them all. And he felt sorriest for Tom Becker, for Tom stood to lose his head. Though that might mean Bill's promotion, and though he didn't like Tom very well, because Tom had played a dirty trick to get Ed Burleigh's place that time, still Bill couldn't help feeling sorry, for he liked no profit that had to come through somebody else's trouble and ruin.

As he rode around the steep shouldered slope which formed the lower side of the draw, he met Tom coming. Bill was surprised to see him there.

Tom even in his slicker was a rather heroic figure. It has been observed that beauty may be only skin deep. The heroic, it might be added, may be just as shallow. With his broad shoulders, bulging chest, his proud head and outthrust he-man chin, Tom looked like a regular paladin of the trail. One time in the years past when he was a common hand with the outfit he had hatched up a deal with a "damage farmer" —one of those fellows who raised hell and a little money every time a trail herd came along—and out of that deal the damage the farmer had collected a ruinous fine from the 44's and Tom, smooth schemer, had shouldered old Ed Burleigh out of his job as trail boss. At the same time he went over the head of Bill Brown who even then had been for two years man in line. Tom had covered his tracks well. Two years had passed before any of them showed. Thanks to Bill Brown staying on and looking after everything, the 44 trail herds under Tom had got along all right in the two years. Nothing about the game he had played on old Ed had ever been really proved, so Tom was accepted as a fellow who had *made* good—even if a little too smart.

"Well," he demanded in his thin rasping voice, "how about it? Did you git across?"

"Yeah," answered Bill despondently, because he hated to say the rest, "but that was all. Tom, I hate to say it but we don't dare risk the cattle."

Tom already had made up his mind to risk the herd, if Bill Brown, as he now thankfully saw, was alive. If they lost the herd on the crossing, he could lay the loss on Bill. The outfit then could charge that up to hard luck and Bill Brown. That would give him a look-in on holding his job. If he turned around without trying to cross, some of the boys would be sure to squeal that they could have crossed the first day; and that Bill had wanted to cross; and old Jim Bradley would hand Tom his time.

"Don't dare risk the cattle?" he demanded sharply. "When'd you git charge of this outfit?"

Bill's face reddened and he hung his head. "I didn't mean that Tom. But the crossin's turrible dangerous fer cattle."

There was nobody around to hear the conversation. It was to guard against such a possibility that Tom, instead of waiting for Bill to come to him and hunt him up, had followed the subordinate down here.

"Well," Tom snapped with a heavy frown, "you got across and back. The herd kin too."

Bill hesitated. There wasn't much chance of the herd crossing without a terrific loss. Yet it might get through with only the tailers washed away. That point he would attempt to argue.

Tom put on his front. In a rather high, hollow tone he declaimed the need of the 44 for money.

Bill knew all about that, too. The 44 was hard up. He listened patiently until Tom's oration was finished, then he answered it simply, "But hard up as they air now, Tom, if we lost the herd they'd be plumb ruinated. My God," and his weather-beaten face lost its plainness in a sudden shine of his deeply set dark eyes, "it would be awful on ole Jim. It would be ruin for us all. Tom, ye could never forgive yerself!"

Tom thought the outfit might squeak through. Too, since he was one of those born optimists who cannot conceive of actual catastrophe in anything that concerns themselves, he thought the herd ought to get across somehow. As for his powers of forgiveness for himself, they never had failed him and they never would.

"The outfit," he ranted, "has got to git these cattle up to Dodge on time and git the money! The herd has gotta cross. Go on back an' git to yer lookout on that bluff o' yourn."

ON TOP of the high bluffs on the other side, a listener posted generally could catch from afar the sound of a wall rise coming. Up there the high air currents coming down the river were not delayed by the valley bends and elbows. It always took twenty minutes from the time a wall rise could be detected up there, for the wall to reach the crossing. In that twenty minutes anything on the crossing had plenty of time to gain the far bank. Immediately the lookout heard of the danger coming he signaled. Then any of the herd waiting to enter the ford were held back, until at express train speed the wall of water passed and the river fell back again to normal.

Never having seen a wall rise, though he knew they occurred, Becker had no realizing fear of one. He didn't believe one of them ever would hit him. But in case anything should happen on the crossing, he wanted Bill up on the bluff so that everything would appear regular.

"All right," said Bill with a sigh, "I'll go. Three shots if she sounds common; five ef ye ort to git the cattle back ag'inst the bluff."

With that, he turned his horse. Then the utter recklessness of the project smote him. The 44 was his outfit even if they hadn't done much for him. He thought of the ruin this wild business was almost certain to bring upon them. Reining back, he lifted his hand warningly and in a tone that rang with conviction he cried, "Tom Becker, I tell ye, ye daren't resk it! I tell ye, ye air reskin' the ruin o' the 44's! Tom Becker, I cain't see why ye'd do it!"

Becker's big face turned both white and scarlet, in patches. He assumed an implication in those last words which hinted the very thing he dared not have uncovered. For a full minute he stared blankly. He didn't know but that Brown somehow was onto him.

Then in his anxiety to rid himself of that ruinous thought he felt himself saved in the sudden wild idea that Bill might be trying to bluff him out of the crossing in order to have him fired and grab his place.

Ordinarily had he thought of anyone trying to undermine him he would have gone into a wild rage; but he was afraid now. He looked at Bill searchingly. Then in a very uncertain voice he said, "Go on. Do as I tell you." And to make sure the affair went no farther against him, he spurred his horse sharply round, back into the draw.

Bill didn't know how nearly he had won. Grasping at the last straw of hope for the outfit, to do the little he might, he wheeled the sorrel and galloped back through the rain to the crossing. Again he removed his boots, listened, heard only the unceasing sing; and the good sorrel took him across. He didn't stop on the north bank to pull on his boots or to rest his horse. He hadn't time. It would take him half an hour to ride up a little side canyon between two bluffs, and then, winding out of that, to gallop back on the narrow tongue of plain which ended in the coign of vantage he

must reach. He pulled on his boots as he rode; and when he got the boots on he began to use his spurs.

In a little longer time than he had counted on, for the steep climb out of the side of the canyon was very slippery under the rain, he reached the top. Then wheeling, he rode at a sharp canter on the precipitously narrow flat back toward the brink.

Just as he reached that lofty edge the lightly falling rain ceased. He was glad of that for two reasons; the murmur of rain in the air sometimes could be mistaken for the first distant murmur of a wall rise coming; and if rain was falling there was the chance of it blurring and hiding the smoke of his pistol in case he had need to signal. He thought of those things, because for many years now it had fallen to him to be first man over when South Fork was in flood, and to be responsible from this very lookout for the herd and the lives of the trail hands with it.

It was very still up there with the rain over; no sound but the thin humming of the channel far below.

Looking across toward the mouth of the draw but little over half a mile away, he saw it already filled with cattle and riders coming out to thin the cattle into a narrow file so that they would not bunch on a wide front when they got down to the crossing.

Then suddenly just like the sighing of a wind in great trees high above his head came a breath of sound. His deeply set eyes opened wide. He knew that sound!

It was a wall rise far upstream, rushing down from where some waterspout had burst, deluging the already overflowing plains. He listened intently. As though that sound were in another world it grew and grew, seemingly without increase of loudness or of intensity. It became vast. Then suddenly it hushed.

He knew by the fall of it that it meant a great rise; perhaps a three-foot wall; a wall high enough to overflow the shallow channel and sweep the valley on either side, drowning anything that happened to be caught in a low place.

Then just as the magnitude of the sighing hushed, it rose and grew again like the eerie sighing of a wind in great trees overhead. He took out his six-shooter, fixed his eyes on the riders across the valley with the cattle, and at very brief intervals fired clusters of five shots into the air.

At the last signal he saw two of the distant men suddenly gallop ahead of the cattle and begin heading them back around the way they had come. Bill's simple face became fairly radiant. He thought that Becker's wild recklessness had ended abruptly; that the herd was saved.

THEN as he stood there with that high, other world sound rising and rising until he seemed to hear it far away in space, his eyes widened and his face went white. He saw a big man whom he knew to be Tom Becker ride full speed out of the draw to the boys who had stopped the cattle. Then he saw the cattle break ahead of Tom and go running down the valley, and the two boys ride after them—not to head them again, but to keep them going.

Just why his signal had been heeded and then disregarded he did not know; but he did know that the herd must be halted and that it was up to him to have it halted. With all haste he refilled his six-gun and emptied it into the air.

The only effect apparent was to increase the hurry of the cattle down into the valley.

White-faced, wild-eyed, trembling all over, he leaped into his saddle and put the sorrel to a dead run back along the narrow tongue on his heartbreakingly tortuous way to the valley and the crossing. He didn't know what he was going to have to do or how he was going to do it. All he knew was that the 44's were on the verge of ruin, that the cattle and men—everything in the trail outfit but himself—was approaching certain destruction, and that no matter why that was, he must do what he could to save them.

Where he had to leave the plain to go down the wall of the side canyon, was a descent of fifty yards straight as a die, and not many degrees less than perpendicular. The right way to make that descent was to dismount, start his horse down the trail, then get behind him. It was too steep for the horse to try to stop or to turn and it was dangerous to be in front of him.

But Bill, with two miles to go to the crossing against a half a mile for the herd he had to stop, was counting every second vital. He came to the brink of the declivity at a gallop; and at a gallop he went over.

The sorrel, rocking back to his haunches, went slithering, skating on his hocks. Where the steep straight descent ended in a sharp turn and a ten-foot drop, the animal could not check himself, but he crashed

down upright on the switchback of the trail which wound on from the foot of that drop, without damage to himself.

There was damage though to Bill, for the sorrel, alighting on the switchback, whirled with all his might to save himself from a second drop of fifty feet. And in whirling he crashed his rider into the face of the bank. Bill's right arm caught the full impact and snapped above the elbow.

He looked at it. He didn't turn white and he didn't turn sick. The weak heads always seem able to stand more that way. Like their backs their hearts are strong.

With his left hand he slipped the dangling right forearm into his slicker front for support. Then he picked up his reins, and speaking sharply to the sorrel, he spurred him on down the slippery but otherwise safe trail.

He reached the mouth of the canyon without further mishap, and looked across. The van of the herd was now half way down to the ford, and the whole herd was in the valley. Well up toward the front Becker was riding in and out among the cattle, whipping at them with his rope to force them on.

In his amazement at the sight, Bill forgot his broken arm. Suddenly what seemed the only possible explanation of such folly came to him in the thought that Tom Becker had gone crazy; and that with the ingenuity which he had heard was characteristic of the insane, Tom had told the boys that the warning signals which those two boys had heeded were only signals that the way was safe.

What Bill had to do then was apparent to him. He had to get to the crossing, and if the boys didn't realize their danger then, he himself must recross.

A man inclined to deliberation would have recalled that the sorrel might be getting pretty tired. And he would have chilled at thought of attempting to make that crossing against time on any horse. It was a question even in Bill's mind if any horse could reach the farther bank before that mighty wall rise, coming like the wind somewhere not far away, should sweep the crossing.

But he was sure that if he started into the ford the men would realize their danger in time to throw the herd back toward the far edge of the valley. Without thought of saving his horse for any further great effort he spurred him the long quarter of a mile along the hummocked way to the crossing. Fortunately under the rain the deep sand over which he rode was packed and solid. That saved the sorrel's strength when his strength most needed to be saved.

Bill's wild approach to the crossing had no effect upon the movement of the herd. With great misgiving, but with purpose far beyond that, he put the sorrel into the ford. When the boys saw that, he thought they would understand and stop the herd.

The herd did not stop. Becker still urged among the leaders with his rope. Nor did the boys along the flanks desist.

Becker had gone crazy indeed His insanity, however, was of no rare kind. It was that common to every lying schemer, who, about to be undone, straightway imagines that every man is just another kind of lying rascal. He had persuaded himself that Brown, whose interest it was to have the herd turned back, deliberately had deceived him with the signals. And Tom had a gift of gab. He had pointed out Bill's interest to the simple punchers, and those thoughtless fellows, though half doubting him, were half believing him, because he had told them previously he had watched Bill ride across the ford and the water nowhere had touched the horse's knees.

All that was but the every-day insanity of the go-getter who tries to bull through regardless.

BILL BROWN didn't have to understand the processes. To him the fact of it was plain. Soon as the boys saw he was really coming he knew they would begin to hang back. They were not utter fools.

The herd was still two hundred yards from the far end of the crossing.

Bill thought of his chances with the wall rise, but he thought more of his duty to the 44's—to old Jim Bradley, to the boys, and to the crazy man whom he did not recognize as just the every-day cheap rascal tumbling at last to the level which is inevitable. Only pitying that insanity which was forcing him to dare the wall, he urged the sorrel to his best.

He was a hundred yards in the channel.

Some of the boys checked up a little. He could see them stop to stare at him. He shouted but he knew that his voice was lost in the singing of the current, for Becker and the others drove straight on.

He was half way across. Now he could see results. All of the boys but the two

abreast of Becker had stopped their advance. Some were heading cattle toward the bluff.

Suddenly he saw Becker and those two stop and begin to talk. Then the two boys began spurring to drive the front of the cattle toward the bluff. But Becker, every now and then looking back over his shoulder, rode slowly on to the crossing.

The herd would be saved. Bill's work was done. Now he could think of himself. He had to go on and finish his doubtful race with the wall rise. For he was now just past midstream. He spoke to the sorrel.

That good horse forced on exactly like a plow horse on a heavy pull. He went slowly, and now and then the sound of his breathing came in a sharp whistle that Bill could hear above the humming of the flood.

Bill's life depended on the sorrel. He knew that he dare not urge him. A misstep now would mean the end.

A hundred yards from the bank the horse suddenly took on urgency of his own. His keener ears had caught the coming rumble of the wall. He did not break his plodding gait, but merely increased it to the last ounce of his strength. His breathing was a sharp, high whistle now. The cheek pieces of his bridle and the curb strap edged white with lather.

Forty yards from the bank Bill heard the wall. It seemed to pass like the whipping of a great curtain far above his head. Then the curtain fell and the valley fairly shook with a roar that grew.

A mile away he saw the wall! Its color told. It was black as ink.

He gave it only the one swift glance. It was coming, he knew, at thirty miles an hour. In two minutes it would sweep the crossing. He was sure the sorrel might make the forty yards, but wondered if the beast would have strength to climb the bank.

Then hope filled his breast. He saw Becker ride down into the wagon cut and stop his horse at the edge of the water. He thought Tom had come to help him up the bank. Tom's face had the wild look of the madman ready to do murder!

Tom couldn't very well afford to have Bill Brown escape the wall. With all the lying he had done to the boys, a word from Bill would not only mean the end of Tom with the 44's but the end of him wherever a report of his duplicity might reach. It would drive him out of the country.

He could see the condition of the sorrel. All he had to do was plant his own horse in the wagon-cut. When the sorrel struggled out, barely able to hold footing on the little climb, a sharp whirl of his mount with rump against the sorrel's forequarter would fling him back again. There wasn't one chance that either horse or man could scramble out before the wall came down.

TOM, as he sat there on his horse, was no shrinking figure. His demeanor was that of the go-getter regardless, when he reveals himself at last.

Even Bill divined that. He knew he was at the mercy of the man who had broken Ed Burleigh, at the mercy of the man who had wanted to risk the outfit for his own microscopic ends, at the mercy of the man who would not willingly give him life.

Then the dread of death came over Bill and he made his appeal. He dropped the reins on the sorrel's neck, and forcing his broken arm out of its rude sling, he let the arm fall to show his utter helplessness.

Becker's big strong face lighted with a triumphant smile. Upset back into the current, Bill with that broken arm could never pull himself out in time.

The trail hand, now only ten feet from the bank looked away. Two hundred yards on his right the wall was coming. It was a yard high. It was black as the pit. Its power and speed were terrific. But he could look at it. It was kinder, more merciful than the human demon above him.

But those sixteen punchers of the 44 had only half believed Tom Becker, and now they all saw he either had lied or had been mistaken, and that had it not been for Bill Brown they would have been in the way of that awful wall. Every man jack of them wanted a hand in seeing that Bill got out. And just as Tom wheeled his big horse in the cut and held him ready for the execution of his foul intention, those punchers galloped down upon him.

He tried to cover himself. But those horsemen could be deceived by no man with a horse in that position—rump toward the man he claimed he wanted to save. A dozen six-shooters gleamed dully down on him, and he was through.

Four boys more practical than those handy with the guns, threw loops and caught the good sorrel by the neck. They wheeled their own horses under spur.

Then the sorrel and Bill came up the bank, and the wall of death went by.

HELL'S HOT SPREAD

Lew leapea high and dragged his partner from the saddle.

A Novelet by WILCEY EARLE

"THERE'S no two ways about it, Travois, we've got to have water!" Old Tod Downing of the Crowfoot cow outfit, flopped panting into a chair on the porch to mop the sweat from his fat, red face. "An' we've got to have that damned quick!"

"You ain't lettin' me in on no secret," growled Lew Travois, the new junior partner of the spread, sprawled on the steps below. "It's dead easy to say we've got to have water, but gettin' it's another thing." He gouged dejectedly at a knot with his spur rowel, his lean, tanned face—prematurely wrinkled by wind and sun—haggard and worn, his pensive gaze on the endless greasewood flats that shimmered in the heat of a scorching forenoon sun.

"There's always a way to get things if you've got the guts!" Tod snorted. "But weak-kneed sisters who set around an' pray fer 'em never get nothin'."

No matter how many head of cattle were to be saved from that dry death, Lew Travois could never repay that friend for his life, nor save himself from a gunman's future on the owlhoot trail!

He produced a cigar, bit off the end, spat it out savagely and rolled the weed between thick weather-cracked lips. Then he fumbled in his pocket for a match, dragged forth a handful of odds and ends. Something dropped to the porch to shatter and shower them with stinging particles. Lew reached for it. It was a small, round pocket mirror such as was once used by saloons for advertising. He turned it over in his hand. On the celluloid back was the likeness of a gaudily pretty woman peeking at him coquettishly from behind a fan.

"Now see what you've done!" Lew exclaimed. "Busted a lookin' glass. You're in a hell of a fix." With his jackknife he trimmed out the splintered glass, wiped off the celluloid and slipped it into his pocket.

"Bustin' a lookin'-glass ain't nothin'," old Tod puffed. "I've got another one just like it." He pulled forth a second glass, identical with the first. "Got 'em into the bar at Sandy Point years ago. Only ones in the country like 'em." He passed the duplicate over for Lew's inspection, then rammed it back into his pocket.

"Bustin' a lookin'-glass means seven years of bad luck," Lew said gravely. "As if we ain't got trouble enough without that."

"Seven years' bad luck?" A fearful light flared up in Tod's piggish little eyes. "They do say that, don't they?" It was obvious that mention of the old superstition had found a gullible victim. With fingers that trembled, he lighted his cigar. "But how the hell can we have any worse luck than we're havin'? No rain fer weeks. Our stuff dyin' by the dozen. Water-holes dried up. Our hay crop gone. Pastures burned to a crisp. Seven years' bad luck! Hell, this drought is givin' us that this summer!" He got to his feet to waddle about on short, fat legs. "Water's what we've got to have. Them springs of old Bert Shawnee's—the damned water-hog!"

Knowledge of the uneasiness his remark had aroused within the superstitious old Tod moved Lew's thin lips in a smile. But it vanished quickly.

"An' I'm tellin' you like I've told you before, you ain't goin' to rob poor crippled Bert Shawnee of his water."

IN THE few weeks he had been on the Crazy Horse, range folk had taken a great liking to Lew; had come to swear by him as they swore at old Tod Downing.

"You're a fine mark to holler about anybody bein' a water-hog!" A stinging scorn crept into Lew's voice. Of all the ranchers in the region this new partner at the Crowfoot was the one man who had no fear of the ruthless, scheming Tod, who for thirty years had run the range roughshod. "You, who, they tell me, has stole water on Crazy Horse fer thirty years. I'm new up here. But I got the straight of the Shawnee waterhole deal. An' just because Bert Shawnee was smart enough an' had guts enough to homestead your water-holes you're bawlin' like a roped calf." He paused to twist a cigaret.

"Sure, we need water. I've seen this drought fer so long now it makes me sick to look at things witherin' up an' dyin'. Here it is only the middle of July an' the grass is gone. Nothin' left but sun an' heat and flies! I'd give me arm fer a breath of cool air; fer a cold drink; fer somethin' besides these blazin', stinkin' flats; fer things growin' instead of dyin'—"

"But—" expostulated old Tod in an effort to halt the bitter tirade.

"Damn your thievin' old soul!" Lew cut in. "If you'd of been on the square we wouldn't be seein' our critters dyin' in their tracks an' runnin' till they drop, huntin' water." He got to his feet to face old Tod, who fell back wheezing. "You got me to put my money into this outfit. Claimed it was your land. But you lied. You was tryin' to beat the government out of them water-holes which didn't belong to you an' never had. Now you're payin', Downing; payin' in dyin' critters. But it's my money that's goin', not yours, you old—!"

"How'd I know the worst drought in thirty years was comin'?" Tod panted, plainly fearful of the quiet-voiced Travois.

"Sure you didn't know!" Lew flung back. "But the good Lord gets your kind sooner er later. He's gettin' you now, burnin' you up, givin' you a taste of the real hell you'll get later on." His gaze swept out over the blistered flats. "Blazin' acres!" he groaned. "Miles an' miles of nothin' but blazin', blisterin' acres!" He sank down on the steps to bury his head in his hands. "An' me payin' fer your crookedness!"

OLD TOD waddled over to drop a hand on his sagging shoulders. "Brace up," he puffed. "Tod Downing ain't whipped yet by a hell of a ways. I've seen droughts before. An' weathered 'em. I'll get water."

"How?" Travois snapped. "Steal it like you've stole ever'thin' else all your life? Steal it from Bert Shawnee, a helpless cripple? Not by a damned sight you won't! Not while I'm able to stop you." He sprang up to whirl on the panting Tod. "You stole from me by sellin' me half of them water-holes you didn't own. But damn you, you ain't goin' to steal from Bert Shawnee to save your crooked old hide!"

"He homesteaded my water-holes!" Tod croaked. "They was mine as much as anybody's. But he'll find out I ain't no fool. I'll get water. All we can use. I've got a joker stashed up my sleeve."

Lew eyed him searchingly. "What's your joker?" he demanded.

"Never mind," old Tod leered. "I've got it. An' I'll get water, too. Inside of a week."

"You've shot off your head about the things you can do so much I'm just goin' to call one of your bluffs, you old four-flusher!" Lew said scornfully. "I'll give you a week to get water; one week to make your word good with me er over the road you go fer fraud! Now damn you, let's see the joker you're always braggin' about. But I'm warnin' you, Downing, don't pull a crooked deal ner harm old crippled Bert Shawnee er the seven years' bad luck you've got comin' fer bustin' that lookin'-glass won't hold a candle to the trompin' I'll give you. Bert's my friend. An' when you beat a friend of mine you've got me to whip!"

Quitting the porch, he strode away toward the barn, spur rowels jangling angrily.

Tod slumped into his chair to stare after him. "Seven years' bad luck?" he muttered. "Thinks he can scare me. Me, Tod Downing, who never got caught by drought er nothin' else without a cutter!" He slouched forward, chewing savagely on his cigar, his flabby, double chin propped in his hands. "I'll show him an' Bert Shawnee an' all the rest of them they can't beat me!" A crafty gleam came into his piggish eyes—the gleam all Cowland knew and feared!

For weeks the fiery hand of drought had lain like a scourge on the Crazy Horse range. Days of broiling heat; nights that glowed white-hot beneath a flame-colored moon, or became even more stifling when only the blinking stars pierced the depths of the breathless ebon void. Gaping fissures seamed the sun-curled gumbo flats. Shed of their withered leaves, the sage and greasewood were but ugly hulks, bare and gaunt and gray. Hot winds, sickening with the odor of blistered things, sapped the last drop of moisture from the stinking water-holes. Whirlwinds spun across the thirsty lands, driving great tumbleweeds that piled against the fences and in the draws.

Drawn of flank by thirst, reduced to skin and bones by hunger, the panting range herds huddled in the coulees and ravines, fighting the flies that swarmed about in clouds. Other brutes, with death lurking in their seared eyeballs, drifted aimlessly, pausing from time to time to sniff the humid air for water, then going on, finally to drop in their tracks. Here and there a wandering bunch of horses would stop to paw hopefully at the bottom of some mud-caked draw.

Day after day the harassed ranchers watched the burning heavens. But each day was the same. The flaming sun came up to crawl with tantalizing slowness across the flawless blue, an occasional thunderhead on the horizon the only sign of rain that never came. Over Crazy Horse hung a constant threat of death; blistering, withering death that only drought can bring.

AFTER Travois had gone, old Tod Downing sat on the porch of the Crowfoot ranchhouse, rocking monotonously in a creaking chair. Yet for all the smug smile on his thick lips there was a worried light in his eyes. "Seven years' bad luck!" he mumbled over and over again. "Damn him, I'll show him!"

Presently he saw Travois lead his horse from the barn, saddle it, mount and set out on the road toward town. He fell to wondering what was taking Lew to Sandy Point; why he had not mentioned his going. For a time it bothered him but other things soon drove it from his mind.

Near mid-day he arose and waddled to the barn, there to secure his own horse and ride south. The further he rode away from the Crowfoot the more furious his pace; as though the wild running of his horse was necessary to the swift and ugly scheme his piggish little eyes told plainly he had concocted. The brute ran itself into a lather. Still the stinging rowels goaded it through the broiling heat to greater speed. Nor did Tod Downing pull rein until he had ridden up to a cottonwood log cabin nestled in a wide and grassy draw near the brakes of Powder River.

Swinging down from his blowing horse,

he puffed up to the house to enter without knocking.

"Howdy, Bert!" he greeted a weazened, dried-up old man hunched in a wheelchair near the open door. "Ain't this heat hell?" He mopped the sweat and grime from his face and dropped into a chair, his eyes sweeping the bare room where Bert Shawnee, the cripple, made his home. "How you standin' it?"

Unable though he was to leave the wheelchair—due to an injury to his back years before—it seemed for a moment that old Bert was on the point of hurling himself upon his visitor. His first flash of anger past, an anxious light crept into his faded eyes: "What do you want here?" he demanded.

Once the two had been friends. But that was before the ruthless Tod had, by underhanded dealing, gotten possession of Bert's land. Shawnee had claimed revenge. Stumbling upon the fact that Downing's fences were illegal about the big springs of Crazy Horse—the only water on the range in summer—and that an isolated section was available to entry, old Bert had homesteaded and proved up. Downing swore to rout him. Expenditures to carry on the persecution swept old Tod to the brink of bankruptcy. And to no avail. Bert Shawnee refused to be intimidated!

To save himself from ruin, Downing had sold half the Crowfoot to Lew Travois, a cowboy who had fallen heir to eastern money. Had the year been good, things might have gone as Tod intended. But the drought brought disaster to his scheme. Too late Lew found out about the water-holes. But even then, honest and fair as he was, he warned old Tod against further persecution of Bert Shawnee, to whom he had become greatly attached, and who he swore would never be deprived of his lawful rights. But in this he reckoned without the cunning of old Tod Downing.

"How's the water comin'?" Tod asked presently in an offhand manner. "Got plenty?"

"Fer my own stuff," Bert answered sullenly, his anxious gaze riveted on Downing.

"It's water I rode over to talk about," Tod said, ignoring the hostility in the cripple's voice. "The Crowfoot needs water."

"So that's it?" Shawnee exclaimed with obvious relief. "You're just the kind that'd skin a man out of his eye teeth then come whinin' fer a favor."

"Course, the drought's bad but I wasn't worried none," Tod went on patronizingly. "I knowed you had enough fer both of us."

"I ain't got water fer the Crowfoot!" Shawnee growled.

"I won't need it all," Tod said quickly, a smug smile settling on his thick lips. "There'll be plenty fer all our stuff. How many head you runnin'?"

"Twenty, if that's any of your business!" Shawnee flared. "An' what's more, them springs'll furnish water fer 'em if this drought lasts forever."

"Of course," Tod agreed. "You've got more than you need. But I reckon you can use a little money. I aim to pay you."

"Don't want pay," Shawnee growled.

"Ever' man's got to have money," Downing exploded. "'Specially if he's crippled an' in the shape you're in. How much water can you spare?"

"Not a drop!" Shawnee cried. "An' after the way you've skinned me you're just wastin' your time askin'. I wouldn't stake you to a drink if you was dyin'!"

A swift change came over Downing. A snarl twisted his lips. The crafty gleam that old Shawnee had cause to fear crept into his piggish eyes. "I'm warnin' you that the Crowfoot ain't goin' to see its critters die as long as you've got water!" he grated.

Something in the tone increased the cripple's apprehension. But he held his ground. "That water's mine!" he shouted. "You beat me out of ever'thin' else. But damn your soul, you'll never get a drop of it!"

OLD TOD'S face grew purple with fury. "I've made you a proposition to buy water!" he snarled. "You'll take it er you won't get nothin'!"

"You can't hurt me no more," Shawnee shot back in a tone which, while spirited, was filled with anxiety and lacked conviction. "I'm tellin' you fer the last time you can't have water!"

"Can't, huh?" sneered Tod. "Well, we'll see about that!" He arose to glare down hatefully at the cripple. "When you homesteaded my water-holes you figured you'd give me a trimmin'! Thought you'd got even fer what you claimed I'd done to you. But I'm still too smart fer you, Shawnee. There's one thing you overlooked."

"One thing I overlooked?" Bert cried. "What's that?"

"The water rights on them springs!" An ugly grin twisted Downing's face.

"The—water—rights?" Shawnee gasped. "Why—Lew's—"

"Lew!" old Tod snorted contemptuously. "What does he know? He'll get what's comin' to him, too, before long!"

"But Lew said—" Shawnee attempted nervously.

"Damn what Lew said!" old Tod blazed. "I hold the water rights on them springs."

"You—hold—the—water rights?" Shawnee whispered hoarsely. "Lew said—"

"An' I'm servin' notice on you, Shawnee," Downing cut in to snarl, "not to use a drop of water only fer drinkin', to open them holes an' let the overflow go down the draw 'cause I've got the flood rights above an' below them springs! Crowfoot stuff starts waterin' here tomorrow!"

"But—but—" protested old Bert. "It—ain't—right. Lew said—" Fear and anger choked him. He fell to trembling violently.

"You'll try to beat me out of water, will you?" Tod sneered. "How do you like it now? How'll your double-crossin' friend Lew like it?" He started for the door.

"But my stuff?" Bert cried. "I've got a right to water it."

"Not a hoof gets a drop!" Tod flung back.

"You can't stop me!" Shawnee screamed, struggling to climb out of the chair. "The law'll protect me. My critters have a right to water. They'll die!"

"Let 'em die!" Tod said heartlessly. "That's what you'd of let mine do." He waddled back to stand above the old fellow. "But I ain't so hard as you think," he said, a new and oily note in his voice. "Long as you ain't got water I might consider takin' your homestead off your hands."

"I won't sell," Shawnee shouted. "Damn you, you're tryin' to skin me again." His hands worked convulsively, his voice trembled, he was dangerously near hysteria. "Help me on to a horse," he pleaded. "I've got to see Lew."

"Lew can't do you no good," Tod sneered, "I'm the one that's got the brains. You're cornered. But even then I'm tryin' to be fair. I'm offerin' to buy you out so's you won't have to go to the poorhouse."

"Honest to God, Tod, are you tellin' me straight?" old Bert sobbed.

"Sure I am," Downing said. "You've got your choice. Go without water er sell!" Again he started for the door.

"I'll sell," Shawnee muttered brokenly. "'Cause I can't fight back. If Lew was only here. He'd help me."

"Lew ner nobody else can help you," Downing snarled. "This here's my game. I'll give you a dollar an acre fer your land an' ten dollars a head fer your stock."

"That's robbery!" Shawnee wailed. "Why the improvements alone—"

"A dollar an acre!" Tod repeated coldly. "Fer ever'thin'!" He stepped outside. "It's your last chance. When I leave, your water's gone!"

A MOMENT of silence, broken only by the rasping breath of the cripple. "I'll—have—to—take—it," he choked.

Tod came back to pull out his checkbook. "A section at a dollar an acre is six hundred an' forty dollars," he figured aloud. "Ten dollars a head fer twenty head is two hundred more, makin' eight hundred an' forty dollars." He scribbled a check for the amount and passed it over. "Make me a bill of sale fer ever'thin'!" he ordered.

He took a piece of paper from his pocket. With trembling fingers, old Bert Shawnee wrote a crude bill of sale. Pocketing it, Downing started away. "I'll bring the buckboard over an' take you to the railroad tonight."

"I can't go right away," Shawnee groaned, staring dully at the check. "I've got some things to 'tend to; some fellers to see. Send Lew over."

"Lew's gone to town. Won't be back fer a week," Downing lied. "This place is mine. You're goin' tonight."

"But Lew's to see me today," Bert persisted. "He—"

"Well, he won't!" Tod broke in coldly. "I'll be back quick as I can with the buckboard. Pack up what duds you want to take along."

He waddled over to his horse to pull himself aboard and rowel away, leaving Bert Shawnee, who had wheeled his chair to the open door, staring after him.

ONCE out of sight of the cabin old Tod's fat sides quivered with laughter. "Wasn't that good!" he gloated. "Buy that fool out on a four-flush play like that!" He patted his startled horse's neck. "Hoss, I ain't got no more water rights on them springs than the man in the moon. I've made application but I ain't got it yet. But I don't need it now. The place is mine. I'll get rid of Shawnee an' nobody'll be any the wiser." He drew rein to gaze on the sweltering range. "Now fer Lew Travois," he grated. "He's next an' when I get

through with that jasper he'll know he's been taken to a cleanin'."

Putting his horse into a lope he headed for the springs. Beside a deep pool, at one end of which the water bubbled up like a miniature geyser from a pebbled bed, he dismounted and sprawled on his belly to drink.

"That's good," he muttered. "An' it's mine. Mine 'cause I used my brains." He crawled on to a big rock on the bank beneath a cottonwood tree and pulled forth a cigar. Then he reached in his pocket for a match. The duplicate of the mirror he had smashed at the Crowfoot came away in his hand.

"Seven years bad luck!" he chuckled. "If I've had bad luck today I'd sure hate to have good luck." Lighting his cigar he snapped away the match and fell to observing himself appraisingly in the glass.

For a considerable time he studied his own coarse features in the mirror, the while gloating over his trickery. Then, of a sudden, he stirred. His nostrils twitched with a pungent odor that had come in on the hot wind. He glanced around. The match he had tossed aside so carelessly had set fire to a clump of tinder-dry bunchgrass. He arose to stamp it out just as a lone rider bobbed on to the skyline and headed swiftly in the direction of Shawnee's cabin. It took but a glance to tell him who that horseman was—Lew Travois returning from town!

Panic seized old Tod. For Travois, for anyone, to encounter Shawnee at this time meant ruin! He stood for a moment staring at the rider. Then his gaze flew to the burning bunchgrass. The flames were creeping around the spring toward the draw, down which the roof of Shawnee's cabin was visible. He whirled. A strong hot wind struck him in the face. The Crowfoot lay above; below only Shawnee's cabin and the brakes of Powder river!

He began panting violently. The horseman was coming on; bobbing like a cork on the swimming sea of heat. Again his foot came up to stamp out the fire. Another clump of bunchgrass flared up. In a breathless second the tinder-dry grass had burst into flames about him. The looking-glass dropped from his nerveless fingers on to the rock as he sprang to his horse, climbed up and roweled away toward the Crowfoot. Once he looked back. The fire had gained the rim of the draw and was now racing toward Shawnee's cabin!

Four miles below Bert Shawnee's place Lew Travois jerked his horse to a halt to sniff the air.

"Smoke!" he cried aloud. He waited for a moment, sweeping the horizon anxiously. The haze that had enveloped the flats for weeks suddenly had become thick as fog. The sun too, was taking on the appearance of a ball of fire. To the north fluffy clouds of white drifted up over the rims of the draws. The pungent odor of smoke increased with each passing moment. The heat, blistering as it had been, now seemed to beat down upon him with suffocating intensity. As he watched a finger of flame reached up on the skyline to clutch at the tufts of bunchgrass that burned in puffs of fleecy white.

Quickly Lew seized up the situation. The fire was between him and the Crowfoot—unless the ranch too, already had burned—and was sweeping down upon old Bert Shawnee's cabin!

Lew's rowel sank deep. His horse lunged away. The wind, now heavy with the stink of smoke, struck him full in the face. Before he had advanced a mile, the fire was sweeping forward on an unbroken front along the northern horizon. Great clouds of smoke were rolling into the heavens. Fingers of flame, like streaks of lightning, were shooting into the air. He goaded his horse to greater speed.

Not once did it occur to Travois how the fire had started. The grass was so dry, the slightest spark from a cigarette or match could have done it. He had seen it before; knew the terror, the devastation; the abject horror wrought by those leaping, glowing tongues that were devouring the parched range.

Topping a hogback, he came in sight of Shawnee's cabin! A groan escaped him. Already the fire was threatening old Bert's out buildings! The discovery sent him lunging ahead in a new burst of speed.

Then of a sudden he saw Shawnee's barn flare up; was close enough to hear the roar of the flames and the crackle of the tinder-dry wood.

"I'm comin', Bert!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "It's Lew. Hang on!"

He thundered into the barn yard, the sweat pouring from his body, his face and hands blistered, his clothing scorching hot.

Between the blazing barn and house he roweled his frenzied mount; threw himself

from the saddle. Clinging to the bridle reins he leaped to the door.

"Shawnee!" he cried. "It's me—Lew. Help yourself fer all you're worth!"

"Lew!" The terrified voice of the old man came back weakly. "We can't make it. I'd just be a burden. Go on without me."

"Like hell I will!" Travois barked. "This ain't no time to auger." He sprang aside as the roof of the house burst into flames to send a shower of sparks about him. "Come here! Here, to the door! I can't let go my hoss. He'd skin out. Come on, Shawnee. Fer God's sake, hurry!"

HE DARED a glance about him. He was almost surrounded by hissing, popping flames. The cottonwood, however, was burning with very little smoke for which he was thankful. Then he heard Shawnee choking and panting just inside. He reached out blindly. His hand closed over the old man's wasted shoulder. He jerked him clear of the wheelchair, lifted him bodily, threw him into the saddle and vaulted up behind him. He gave his horse the rowels just as the blazing roof fell with a splintering crash.

Once away from the wall of flame that seared his body and left him fighting for breath, he raced south. The wind stirred up by the flying horse tore at his lungs. His strength was deserting him. Only by a masterful effort did he manage to stay with the running brute and at the same time support Shawnee's swaying form in the saddle.

After an infinity of time he gained the brakes. Putting his winded mount down a steep bluff on its rump he struck the dry bed of the river in a choking cloud of dust and started the long and tedious climb up through a crevice on the opposite side of the river. On top he drew rein and slid to the ground.

"We're safe here, Bert," he panted. "The fire can't jump the river. It'll burn itself out in the brakes yonder."

But the old man made no answer. Nor did he move. Tenderly Lew lifted him down from where he was drooped lifelessly over the horn and stretched him out. A quick examination indicated that Shawnee was only suffering from smoke and fright. Lew did what he could to aid him but without water his efforts were well nigh hopeless.

HE STRAIGHTENED up presently to look around. To the north the prairie was a rolling, tumbling mass of flames and smoke.

"Ain't that luck?" he mused bitterly. "If it started above the Crowfoot I'm busted clean to my dewclaws. But then, hell," he shrugged, "it might just as well burn up quick like this as slow the way it's been burnin' up with drought. Wonder what old Tod thinks of bustin' a mirror now?" He fell to pacing about nervously, cursing his helplessness, his utter impotence at such a time. "Wonder how she got started? Some puncher—"

He broke off, suddenly concerned for the safety of his men to whom, until now, he had given no thought. Stooping down, he shook Shawnee roughly. "Bert!" he shouted. "I've got to go back. Mebbyso some of the boys need help. You're safe here. The fire can't burn across the brakes. Do you hear me, Bert?"

An audible gasp from the cripple was his answer.

"You lay still till I get back," Travois directed. "I'll come fer you quick as I can. An' Bert," he patted Shawnee's shoulder, "you know what we've been waitin' fer; what I went to town fer today? Well, we got it, old-timer!"

The cripple's eyes fluttered open. Pleasure lit them for a moment to vanish before a wild and terrified light. He tried to speak. Only incoherent gutturals issued from his throat. With a great effort he raised himself on one elbow to point with trembling finger toward the flames.

"I know, I know," Lew said soothingly. "But there ain't nothin' to be scared of up here. We come through slick as a whistle. Sure you ain't hurt?"

Shawnee shook his head. Again and again he tried to speak. But the words would not come.

"Take 'er easy, Bert," Lew pleaded, striving to quiet him. "You'll be all right here. I'll shag it back; around the end if I can. So—long!" Reluctant to leave the old fellow alone, yet urged on by his sense of duty to his men, Lew strode to his horse. Swinging up, he roweled it down the brakes at headlong speed.

Dusk was settling over the flats when he came up on the opposite side; a murky, yellowish dusk made horrible by the smoke and stench and heat. The flames raced through the withered grass and brush to lap

high into the dingy heavens, illuminating the sky with an eerie, greenish glow. The horizon was a rainbow of shifting color; the gaping maw of some hideous monster crawling forth from a gloomy pit, devouring everything in its path with its fiery breath. Here and there lumbered frantically bawling cattle which paused occasionally to look back, sniff the air fearfully, and tear on.

Realizing the utter uselessness of attempting to check the fire before it reached the river, where it would burn itself out, and consumed with fear for the fate of his men and the Crowfoot, Lew held his reluctant mount's nose toward the flames, and headed for the Shawnee springs. The further he rode the more unbearable became the heat. For a time he paralleled the conflagration, hoping to round the end or find some opening through which to dash. But his search was in vain. The blazing front stretched away unbroken for endless miles, it seemed!

Faced with the alternative of retreating to the brakes or charging the fiery line, he swung his horse toward the flames and went on gamely, the perspiration dripping from his body, the clothes clinging to his sticky flesh, to protect his face from the awful heat. He could hear the popping of the parched brush, see the points of fire flare up with each new morsel, devour it, race on. Closing his eyes and ears to the terrifying sights and sounds, steeling himself for the ordeal that lay ahead, he reached behind his saddle, undid his big yellow slicker—a necessary part of every cowboy's equipment—and slipped into it. Fastening it around his throat, he tied his kerchief over his nose and mouth. Then putting his mount to top speed he thundered on.

At the very rim of the fire the horse tried frantically to stop. Lew's rowel's tore at its sides. With a snort of terror, it plunged ahead!

The next few moments seemed like endless suffocating hours of agony. Flames licked at Lew's legs; threatened to burst his throbbing ear drums with their taunting hiss. He held his breath until he became fearful that he would never breathe again. Still the horse raced on, its hair singed from its body, its soot-rimmed eyes bloodshot and wild. With a heart-breaking spurt it went through, gained the black smouldering ground beyond. There, crazed by the heat, it wheeled and attempted to swing back.

Choking, fighting desperately for air, Lew clawed the kerchief from his mouth and nose and tore off the smoking slicker. Again he gave the horse the rowels. Once started, the frenzied brute ran like mad across the smoking ground toward the Shawnee springs.

With a strength born of desperation, Lew clung to the hot horn, his brain reeling, his body numb with pain. After an infinity of time he realized that the horse had left the ground; was sailing through space. He let go all holds. He was falling—

Then he was conscious of the feel of cold water on his blistered flesh. It cleared his head; eased his pain. But the comfort was only temporary. The first relief past, the water began sending the scalding blood hammering through his veins. Summoning his last ounce of strength, he struck out blindly. Presently his feet touched bottom. He staggered out to throw himself onto a great stone on the bank.

THE first sound of which Lew Travois was conscious was the distant bawling of cattle. Slowly he opened his eyes, expecting to see the lurid hideous creatures of the nightmare that had tormented him. Instead he was staring up at the quivering leaves of a great cottonwood tree. For a moment he lay blinking in unbelief. That tree he knew. He had idled away many hours beneath it. It overspread his favorite haunt—the rock beside the Shawnee springs.

Then of a sudden he remembered. The fire, the dash through the lapping flames, the horse's wild run and plunge into the pool. He sat bolt upright, groaning with the pain that shot through his throbbing body. Dawn was lifting in a fling of vivid color over the rim of the flats. His gaze flew to the south. The fire had burned itself to smouldering points in the brakes, leaving behind a scene of utter desolation, barren, black and ugly.

With the realization that he had lain in a stupor the whole night through, thought of helpless Bert Shawnee, alone across the river, brought him to his feet. And the Crowfoot men whom he had started out so bravely to aid. His bloodshot eyes swept north; grew wide with amazement. As far as he could see the range was untouched by fire. Even the other side of the springs had not been burned. The

flames had started almost at his feet and raced south to the brakes. The Crowfoot was safe!

He sprawled on his belly to drink and wash. The cold water refreshed him. Arising, he looked around for his horse. But it had disappeared. He sat back on the rock, reluctant to quit his cool retreat and walk to the ranch for another mount under the brassy sun that presently would appear. He fell to tossing pebbles into the limpid water below, his eyes on the blackened rim the fire had left around the rock, his mind busy with how the conflagration had started.

"The jasper who started that fire was settin' on this rock," he mused aloud. "Else why ain't the grass on the other side of the pool burned off? But who in the devil was it?" When no answer was forthcoming he strove to dismiss the baffling question from his mind. He stretched out lazily. His hand came in contact with a splinter that pricked him sharply. Extracting it, he found it to be a sliver of glass. A tiny pile of glass lay just beside him. And nearby was a small, round object. He picked it up but before he had more than time to glance at it a bedlam of bellows arose. Hastily pocketing the object, he got to his feet. To the north a great herd of cattle had rounded a butte and was coming toward him.

The bawling increased in volume as the thirsty brutes came nearer. Of a sudden they scented water, broke into a lumbering run and charged down on the springs to plunge belly deep into the pools and lap up the cool water greedily.

LEW quit the rock hastily to avoid being caught in the stampede. But not before he had discovered that the critters were Crowfoots. And driving them were Crowfoot riders. As they pounded closer he could hear old Tod bellowing orders.

"Hello, Travois!" Downing puffed, sighting him. "Where'd you bob up from?"

"Went to town," the cowboy said, walking over to Tod's blowing horse as he loped up. "Got part way back an' run into the fire. Anythin' burn on the ranch?"

"Fire!" Tod exclaimed. "What fire?"

"The whole country from the springs to the brakes burned yesterday afternoon an' evenin'," Lew told him.

"Thought it looked an' smelled kind of smoky yesterday evenin'," Tod said. "But there was a strong wind blowin' south. How about Shawnee?" he asked too anxiously, Lew thought.

"Burned out completely," Lew replied. "Nothin' left. I—"

"So poor Bert's gone!" Tod interrupted to exclaim. "'Course, crippled, he didn't have a ghost of a show. Ain't that too bad?"

The sudden burst of pity for Shawnee, whom he knew Tod hated with all his soul, struck Lew as singular. But he let it pass. "How come you're bringin' Crowfoots down here to water?" he asked.

"Told you I'd get water," Tod boasted. "These water-holes belong to me."

"Belong to you?" Lew repeated in amazement. "Where did you get 'em?"

"Bought 'em," Tod chuckled.

"Yes you did!" Lew scoffed. "Hatin' you like Shawnee does, you couldn't of bought 'em with all the money on earth."

"I've got the bill of sale to prove it," old Tod snarled. "Not only to the water-holes, but to Shawnee's homestead."

Knowing Shawnee and Downing as he did, the assertion aroused Lew's suspicion. "An' I'm askin' how you got it?" he demanded.

"Why, just bought it, that's all," Tod wheezed. "Money talks."

"Your's don't," Lew snorted. "'Cause you ain't got none. You say you bought Bert out? What did you give him?"

It was obvious to the men who had gathered around that old Tod was cornered, fearful under Travois' steady gaze that set him to twisting uneasily in his saddle. "Why—why—" he puffed. "Ten dollars an acre an' fifty dollars a head fer his stuff!" he lied.

"An' you paid him, huh?"

"Yes,"

"How?"

"A check."

"A check fer seventy-four hundred?" Lew mused aloud. "An' you got a bill of sale?" He seized hold of the bridle rein old Tod suddenly had tightened. "You lyin' old—" he accused. "You ain't got seventy-four hundred dollars. But if you did give Shawnee a check, what you goin' to do when it goes into the bank?"

"How can it if it burned up?" old Tod blurted out. "I—" he checked himself abruptly at the sudden light of understanding that flared up in Travois' eyes. "Not that I knowed—" he stammered. I—I—I've got the bill of sale anyhow. An' it's plumb legal."

"What time was you down to Bert's yesterday to get it?" Lew demanded.

OLD TOD'S gaze darted about like that of a cornered beast. "Wasn't down there yesterday," he answered sullenly. "Closed the deal a week ago. Told you I had a joker up my sleeve; that I'd get water inside of a week. Knowed then the springs was mine. Just plannin' to surprise you."

"That's funny," Lew remarked. "I talked with Bert on my way to town yesterday an' he didn't mention sellin'. What was you doin' around the springs yesterday, if you didn't go on to Shawnee's?" he asked suddenly.

"Wasn't at the springs," Tod growled. "Ain't been near 'em fer a week."

"Now, I know you're lyin'!" Lew snapped. "An' I want to see that bill of sale."

"It's back to the ranch," Tod cried. "Honest, I come by it square."

Reaching out suddenly, Lew seized hold of him and dragged him from the saddle. "Tell me the truth an' tell me quick!" he blazed. "How did you get a bill of sale to Bert Shawnee's springs?"

"I—had—the—water—rights." old Tod panted.

"So that's it, huh?" Lew exclaimed. "You had the water rights? You're smart, Downing."

"I'm smart enough to get water like I said I would," Tod sneered, with a poor attempt at bravado.

"Oh, no you ain't," Lew hurled back. "You've just made a fool of yourself; such a damned fool anybody can see through what you thought was a clever scheme. You used the water right talk to force old Bert to sell. But it happens you didn't have the water rights!"

"Like hell I didn't!" Tod blustered.

"No, you didn't," Lew retorted. "'Cause I've got 'em right here in my pocket fer Bert Shawnee. That's what I went to town fer yesterday. An' got a letter addressed to the Crowfoot fer you, tellin' you your application was rejected 'cause Bert had prior rights."

"But I've got the bill of sale!" Tod wheezed, falling back. "An' if Bert Shawnee was here he'd tell you I come by it honest. But the poor devil's dead, burned."

"Don't be too damned sure about that," Lew cut in.

"What do you mean?" Tod faltered, his florid face gone chalky.

"I packed Shawnee out of that burnin' house!" Lew snapped. "He's in the brakes now, plumb alive. Feller's holdin' broke jaspers checks fer a sum you claim to be seventy-four hundred dollars don't die so convenient, Downing!"

"You're playin' in with that — — Shawnee!" old Tod panted. "Double-crossin' your own partner. But you can't prove nothin'."

"I warned you to lay off Shawnee er you'd meet up with more bad luck than the seven years' bustin, that mirror'd bring," Lew retorted.

"You can't scare me," old Tod wheezed. "That seven years' bad luck talk is—"

"It's fourteen now," Lew cut in. "Fourteen 'cause you busted two lookin'-glasses!" Reaching into his pocket, he pulled forth two broken mirrors on the backs of which gaudily-pretty women peeked coquettishly from behind fans. "You bragged they was the only two in the country. You had 'em both at the ranch yesterday mornin'. You busted one there. I found the other'n busted on that rock by the spring yonder where the fire started."

OLD TOD'S face went ghastly. "Honest to God, I didn't mean to start that fire!" he whimpered. "I—"

"Start the fire?" Lew cut in in amazement. "Did you start—"

"I tossed away a match," Tod moaned. "It lit the bunchgrass. I tried to tromp it out. But it got beyond me."

"No, you didn't, you lyin' old devil!" Lew cried. "You let it go thinkin' it would burn Shawnee an' that check. But it didn't. It burned you instead. You'll fork over that bill of sale to old Bert an' square things up. After that if you don't think bustin' lookin-glasses is bad luck, just wait till you do fourteen years fer arson an' attempted murder!"

FIGHTERS IN THE SKY!!
AIR ACTION
DEC. ISSUE, NOW ON SALE FEATURES—
BUZZARDS DON'T USE TRACERS.....By JAMES ROURKE
VICKERS LEAD.....By ARTHUR J. BURKS
SKY-RIDE 'IM COWBOY.....By FREDERICK C. PAINTON
Also—T. W. Ford, Reg Dinsmore, Arch Whitehouse
FICTION — FACTS — MODELS

He turned about in a flash and fired hastily at the two outlaws.

R Harrison

THE DEVIL'S DRIVER

by ZACHARY STRONG

"GUESS you'll have to take her down today, Rufe Mart's got the lumbager that bad he can't turn over in his bunk," said the express agent at Lake.

Rufe Graham nodded and proceeded to get the four half-broken broncos hitched to the stage. He was happy, but it did not show on his grave young face. He had always wanted to drive stage, but he was not going to have anybody kid him.

There were no passengers, and he appeared to have nothing to take down to Farrell but a small mail sack. But when he gathered up the lines two men came quickly out of the express office carrying a small heavy box between them, which they put in under his feet. The agent handed up the waybill.

"Take this right through to the Farrell Bank and get a receipt from the cashier before you pull on to the stables. Hold on a second; Kroll's goin' along."

A short, scrubby-whiskered, frowning man with a shotgun in the crook of his arm and two heavy revolvers at his belt climbed to the seat, and Rufe gave the snorting broncos their heads.

He had hardly clattered out of the village in a cloud of dust when there was a shout, and a slender high-shouldered man

---

It was his first assignment to take that stage coach through a strip of hell itself—and he could either succeed, or die!

with a bushy black beard came racing down the slope, waving his hands.

Rufe pulled in and the man panted up, "Couldn't get here no sooner," he puffed. "Want to get down to Farrell.

Rufe collected the fare and let him climb into the coach, and away they went again, with a jangling of chains and swingle-trees and the patter of hoofs on the stony trail.

Kroll, the guard, was in his usual sour humor. "Be havin' babies drive stage next," he grumbled. "They didn't ought to send bullion down when Mart ain't drivin'. That stuff's valuable—ain't for kids to play with."

Rufe's smooth cheek flushed but he answered quietly, "I got my orders to take her down, an' if you have any kick comin' make it to the agent."

Kroll went on growling sarcastic comments, but the heavy coach was now swinging fast down a curving descent and Rufe's attention was fully occupied in keeping the off leader from jumping through his harness. The near leader, a wall-eyed paint horse, needed watching, too, for he would crowd away from the edge of the road. Off the road there was a thousand-foot slope, steep as a roof and studded with boulders.

Up the taut reins came messages from each horse to Rufe's sensitive hands, and his firm grip told them that they were being driven by a man who knew his business. He felt the near leader stumble and picked him up with a strong steady pull. The wall-eyed mustang on the off side was fighting his bit, so Rufe gave him a little more rein.

THEY came to the place where the road swooped like a hawk into the valley of Ware Creek. The lone passenger suddenly made himself heard, leaning far out of the window, whooping and waving his hat.

Kroll turned with a snarl. "You keep that there face inside, stranger, nobody asked you for a song an' dance."

"I got a license to whoop if I want to," argued the passenger. "It don't cost you a cent, an' if you don't like it, take an' fold up them flop ears of yours so you won't hear."

"It always hurts my feelin's when I hear a jackass," retorted Kroll, grinding his teeth with fury.

"I've heard that mules was that way," flashed back the passenger.

The stage crossed the creek with a billowing splash, flinging the foam and spray in all directions. Then came a short steep climb that calmed even the furious leaders down to a walk. Rufe was watching the struggling horses intently, and Kroll was still fully occupied in his acrid argument with the sharp-tongued passenger.

Just as the stage reached the crest, a man stepped out into the road before them. A thick lisping voice in Rufe's flank shouted, "Handth up!"

Kroll, as renowned for reckless courage as for his crabbed nature, swung to his front and snatched at the shotgun. But the passenger drew a six-shooter and deliberately shot him twice in the back. Kroll fell heavily to the road.

Covered on both sides, there was nothing for Rufe to do but raise his hands. The passenger came around to the front.

"Worked that pretty slick, eh?" he inquired with an ugly grin. "Now, let's get busy. Lift up your feet an' let's get the gold out."

In a few minutes Rufe was left alone with the dying Kroll. The robbers had cut the traces and driven the horses down the trail. They had taken all weapons besides.

He hoisted the guard on his broad shoulders, carried and laid him on the floor of the coach and went to look for the horses. He found the wheelers feeding by the creek, but the wild leaders had rushed off into the mountains. He patched up the slashed harness as best he could, hitched up and drove sadly toward Farrell.

A horseman came out in search of him before he reached the town. The stage arrived in a whirl of excitement. Kroll was still alive, and implacable as ever.

"I believe he was in with 'em," he muttered to the sheriff with his last breath.

Rufe had to submit to a searching cross-examination. "Don't it look pretty suspicious that the stage has to be held up just the one time you was drivin' it?" was the question that met him on every side.

"You're fired," the express agent told him with a sneer. "It costs too much to keep you."

"It wasn't my fault," insisted Rufe

"Maybe."

"I'll show you I'm honest," flared Rufe. "I'll get that bullion back some way. . . ."

The agent laughed. "All right, get it," he taunted. "Then I'll give you your job back. But meantime get to hell out of here."

He received a warning from the sheriff

not to leave town, and found himself in general, an object of suspicion and distrust. A tired posse drifted back to Farrell to report that no sign had been seen of the robbers or of the bullion.

"I don't think we need you around this town," said the sheriff. "It's goin' to be a sign of bad luck for you if you show up here again."

Rufe took the road to Ware Creek. He was determined to redeem himself. The robbers had been on foot, and they could not have carried the box of bullion very far. They must have buried it not far from the scene of the hold-up and would come back for it as soon as the hue and cry died down.

But when Rufe returned to the scene of the hold-up, so many had been there since that nothing remained of the original trail. He went on up the Ware Creek toward the rocky pinnacles that surround Cloudhead Mountain. There he found traces of campfires only a few days old.

Not far from the steep snowy cone of the mountain he came upon his men. But they were on their guard; they saw him as soon as he them. Rufe was forced to retreat down the mountain, the two robbers in pursuit.

Rufe got down to a ranch in a valley with a bullet hole in his leg. The rancher bound up his wound and lent him a horse to take him to Farrell, where he looked up the sheriff.

"I thought I told you to get out of this town an' stay out," said the sheriff.

"But listen," pleaded Rufe, and told his tale.

The sheriff shook his head. "Cloud lays in Farrell County, an' I got plenty troubles of my own right here. You go on over to Farrell an' see can you get Sheriff Wagner to send out a posse."

Rufe rode back to the rancher, left the horse, and, despite his injured leg, went up Cloud once more. But the robbers had moved, leaving no trail.

He was discouraged and broke. He had to earn money to purchase supplies before he could go on with his one-man hunt. He struck for Avoca where a new gold strike had been made. A village of tents and shacks had sprung up out of the deep dust, and there was no water within miles. He got a job drawing water from a spring high up in the hills. Water sold for five dollars a barrel in the new mining camp.

AVOCA was proud of it's unofficial name of Hades' Garden and daily shootings relieved the tedium of existence. Rufe spent little time and money in the various tough joints that made up most of the camp, but he frequently made the round of them, in the hope of picking up some trace of the men he sought.

It was in the Golden Rock that he saw a slim, high-shouldered man who reminded him of Kroll's murderer. But the hold-up man had worn a thick black beard, and this one was clean-shaven.

So instead of studying the man's face, he watched his feet; a man's gait is one thing he can never disguise. Rufe saw the man take three long easy strides and then a short quick one, and noticed that the heel of his left boot turned inward.

He started forward, but the man had been watching him also, and darted out of the door. As Rufe charged out of the saloon a gun went off in his face, and the bullet whipped past his head. He fired at the flash, but did not halt the fleeing man.

Men came tumbling excitedly out of the Golden Rock, and he told them his story. The hunt spread through the camp, but nothing was found of the slender man.

"Just tryin' to get his name up," sneered a man, and Rufe found himself again an object of derision and distrust.

He threw up his job and took to the hills again. The robbers were evidently still in the country, and might make an effort to remove the bullion, now that the hue and cry was over. But he found no trace of them near Ware Creek, and received a warning from a deputy sheriff of Farrell that his presence there was suspicious.

He went on to Jessup in the lower valley. Snow had begun to fall in the high ranges, and if the box had been buried, there would be no digging it up until spring.

He was in Jessup for some weeks, working as a teamster during the day and hanging around the saloons and dance halls in the evening. One night he was in the Ace of Spades, leaning against the flimsy partition that divided the gambling hall from the bar, and idly watching a faro game.

HE WAS very discouraged and about ready to give up and leave the country.

A high, thin voice said, "Hello, Munt. Say, where's Ollie?"

A thick lisping voice answered. "Up

river, I gueth. Told me he wath goin' to thee how thingth wath up there."

Rufe whipped around and applied his eye to a crack in the partition. Within a few feet of him were standing a lank, stoop-shouldered individual with a ragged mustache, and a stout, puffy-lipped man with slightly bowed legs.

Every line of the men who had held him up was photographed on his memory, and he had no difficulty in recognizing the stout man with the lisp as Munt and the other as the passenger.

He made a rush for the door, but a little party of miners, half-drunk and very friendly, chose that moment to come trooping in. A big fellow flung his arms round Rufe's neck.

"Well, hello, Chris, old pard!" he gurgled amiably. "How's the spots on the old boy's belly?"

"You got me wrong, stranger," said Rufe, trying to throw him off.

"Well, well, what's your rush? I thought sure you was Chris. Know Chris Dale. Hell of a fine feller, ain't he? Well, now, if you two ain't as like as two horned toads. We'll have a li'l' drink on that, eh?"

Rufe slid out of his arms to the floor, rose and darted off. But the pair had left the saloon. Jessup was a town of some size, scattered haphazardly up both sides of a shallow valley. He raced through a medley of saloons, dance halls, stores and shacks, but the trail seemed lost once more.

But he remembered that the thick-voiced Munt had said the third member of the trio had gone up river. He jumped his job for the day and followed the river to Cuero, but found no trace of the men there, and returned tired and discouraged to Jessup.

There, almost the first man he saw was the slender, high-shouldered Ollie. He was tired of talking to sheriffs and being sneered at; the thing had become a personal matter between himself and the three. He drew his gun and bored down on Ollie.

He saw Ollie reach for his weapon, and then two guns crashed out behind him. He felt a heavy blow in the back and his knees gave way under him. He fell on his face and a thick black fog seemed to fall on him and blot out consciousness.

When he returned to consciousness he was in a bed. A stout and motherly woman with gray hair gave him something to drink and told him not to talk. Some time later a thin young man with a long crooked nose and a cheerful smile appeared beside him.

"Acute lead poisoning," said the doctor. "Common complaint around here. But you'll get over it; this is a healthy climate."

"Did they get them?" inquired Rufe.

"Well, no, the gentlemen seem to have pulled out of town in a hurry before anybody even got a good look at 'em."

"Guess my luck is out," said Rufe wearily, and turned his head away.

IT WAS spring before he was fit to work again, and his prospects seemed dark. Once more he was broke and out of a job. In addition he owed money to the doctor and the woman who had taken such good care of him. He took the doctor into his confidence.

"Well, I think you've had about enough bad luck for any one man," said the medico. "But I wouldn't get discouraged. Remember this, my son: If a man can hold on long enough, the luck always turns."

"Well then," said Rufe with a faint grin, "I guess I'll take another trip up Ware Creek."

The doctor laughed. "That's the spirit; you've plenty sand in you."

Rufe got a job and paid off part of his debt. The snow was now pretty well gone from the ranges, and he decided to revisit Ware Creek once more, still convinced that the bullion had been buried and never lifted.

One day he found himself tramping along the familiar road to the scene of the hold-up. There had been a number of spring landslides, and in one place the old road had been buried thirty feet deep. He reached Ware Creek, now running deep and muddy and swift, and turned to follow it upward.

And then his luck changed. He turned a sharp corner and came out upon a big slide that had partially blocked the creek.

Almost under his feet were several deep, broad trenches freshly dug in the broken soil, and two men were hoisting a heavy box out of one of these. Another man further up the hill seemed to be on guard, but for the moment his attention was concentrated on the box.

But only for a moment. Before Rufe had time to draw back he was seen. The man above shouted, and set off at a run to cut off his retreat. The other two drew guns and came for him.

His first thought was that he was in a hornet's nest and the sooner he got out of there the better. He turned to double back,

but Ollie had the advantage of the ground, and by cutting across the neck of the bend, blocked his road down the creek.

The man with the high voice crossed the creek, and enfiladed him from the opposite slope. Munt was directly in the rear. He climbed upward seeking better cover, but Ollie held the crest of the ridge and drove him down. He tried to cross the creek, but was halted by the man on the other side.

The scanty bushes and boulders gave insufficient cover to make a stand, so he was harried back and forth, with bullets buzzing at his ears or kicking up the dirt around him. He was not hit, but his own shooting was equally ineffective. The trio gradually closed in and drove him in the direction of the slide. There he would be on open crumbly ground without cover.

He thought of taking refuge in one of the trenches, but there he would be like a wolf in a den, to be killed at the leisure of the hunters.

He saw that there was only one thing for him to do: He must attack and fight his way out. The other thing in his favor was that his assailants were widely separated. Ollie was nearest Rufe, further away from his companions. A climb up the hill to reach him would be slow and difficult, but to get penned in between the slide and the creek would seal his fate.

He put his gun between his teeth and began to scramble upward on all fours, clutching at bushes and rocks and bunch grass. The high-voiced man had come back to his side of the creek and was running diagonally across a spur on his flank to head him off; Munt was coming up in his rear; Ollie held his ground.

All three were shooting at him at once, but he did not halt. The one idea in his mind was that he was going to get Ollie, and his reckless advance seemed to shake the man's nerve, for he missed time and again at shorter and shorter ranges.

Jaws set, face streaked with sweat and dust, a thin trickle of blood oozing from a grazed forehead, Rufe pulled himself up over a rock ten yards from his man. His gun spurted flame and Ollie swayed and fell upon his knees. Then he lay down softly on his face with a deep sigh.

"One!" counted Rufe grimly, as he turned to meet the others.

The high-voiced man was not far away, but halted at sight of Ollie's fall. Rufe made straight for him. He was done now with fighting behind rocks and bushes. Utterly reckless of his own life, he was determined to get the thing over.

The man met him with a blast of fire and one of his bullets clipped the end neatly from Rufe's left forefinger. Swinging the wounded member in pain and fury, spattering blood far and wide, he came stubbornly on. It was not until he was within twenty yards that he commenced to pull trigger. It was almost at arm's length that he fired the final shot that took his enemy between the eyes and ended the duel.

"Two!" said Rufe. "Where's that other bum?"

But Munt had seen enough; he was headed in the direction of the high mountains. Rufe pursued him a mile, firing a few long shots to keep him moving.

He went slowly back. There was nothing to be done for the two men who lay there, so he went down to the box he had seen hoisted out.

The stage from Lake to Farrell came whirling down the mountainside, splashed through Ware Creek and came slowly up the steep rise on the other side. Just as it reached the top a ragged, weary, mud-stained man, with a hand tied up in a bloody rag, stepped out into the middle of the road.

"I got a box for the Bank here," said the worn wayfarer. "Help me get it aboard—I'm near dead draggin' it this far."

The stage drew up before the bank and the astounded cashier found himself faced by an extremely hard-looking stranger who held out a dirty piece of paper, a waybill dated a year before, covering a box of bullion from the Lake Mines.

"Give me a receipt for this," said the stranger. "I was a little late gettin' here with it, but there she is."

THE stage went on to the office, where the agent lounged out to meet it. He nearly swallowed his chew of tobacco when a grimly emaciated man hopped down from the box and stuck a bit of paper under his nose. It was the waybill, receipted by the cashier of the bank.

"Did I make good my brags?" demanded Rufe.

The agent was not a bad man at heart. It took him a moment to think the thing out, then he held out his hand.

"You made good, boy," he said. "And I'll make my promise good; you get your job back."

THE SPEEDY JACKRABBIT

by S. OMAR BARKER

FOR ANYTHING near his size, the jackrabbit is just about the speediest thing on four legs. Coyotes can catch them, but not on the first spurt of speed. The slim wolf has more endurance, and then he is also smart enough to "cut corners" when chasing a rabbit. The jack, however, was recently paced by a Forest Supervisor's automobile on the Minidoka National Forest. The rabbit just happened to jump out ahead of the car and start down the road. Out of curiosity the Supervisor watched his speedometer as he followed the long-legged jack for something like a quarter of a mile. For most of that distance the rabbit maintained a speed of thirty miles an hour.

It is said that antelopes have been thus "paced" by cars as fast as sixty miles an hour, probably the fastest sustained speed of any animal in America, although the cougar, for a dozen jumps or so, is known to be even faster than that. The big cat, however, is shortwinded, and only his first spurt shows such amazing speed. The jackrabbit, apparently, has quite a bit of lasting power, as well as get-up-and-get, for his size.

A DISAPPEARING RIVER

ONE OF THE natural wonders of the short grass cattle country is the disappearing river. This river, the Arkansas, is the second largest tributary to the Mississippi and is among the great rivers of the world. It seems that people, in general, have only a vague idea of the wonders to be found along the course of this big stream. At least a dozen reference books have failed to mention that it is an invisible river for many miles.

At a point in western Kansas the Arkansas river sinks from sight in the prairie landscape and does not appear again for many miles, when it emerges from the sands and continues its course.

In the mountains the flow of this river is torrential and in the spring it is given to freshets and floods but, strange to say, it rarely does any damage. Because there is no loss or evaporation in its underground flow in western Kansas it has formed a subterranean lake or underground sea under hundreds of square miles of "dry farming" country. Wells, capped by windmills, tap this underground flow, all over western Kansas, but it is impossible to bring enough of the water to the surface for practical irrigation purposes. It is possible only to raise enough for household uses, for drinking water and for watering cattle.

THE RIVER rises on the eastern slope of the Rocky mountains in Lake county, Colorado, where it has its beginning in a bubbly little mountain spring. It flows, for a part of its course, through the scenic grandeur of the Royal Gorge. This gorge is nine miles long and is one of the deepest and most beautiful canyons in the world.

The mouth of the Arkansas river in southern Arkansas is the farthest point north where alligators are found. Its headwaters flow through gold-bearing rocks and its lower waters near the only diamond mine in North America. Some of the most valuable fresh-water pearls are found near the mouth. One of these pearls sold, recently, for $7000. The river is 2110 miles long.

by
ED EARL REPP

The Death

IN A SQUALID room in a pine-board hotel under the grim shadows of the Portland jail, blonde, beautiful Janet Warrington, accustomed to luxury and all there was fine among Chicago's elite of the '80's, flung herself upon the musty bed and wept out her heart. Almost across the street, made mucky by recent rains, Harry Tracy, the one and only love in her life, was in a prison cell, convicted of murder.

Against her wealthy father's wishes she had come all the way from Chicago to help him out of what he had written was a minor difficulty. Two years before, she had met Harry, a Montana cowboy, who had performed beautifully in a big rodeo held at the stockyards. He had won first money in the bronco-busting contest and with that glorious ride completed he discovered that he had also won the heart of one of Chicago's most beautiful heiresses.

A dashing, handsome young man was Harry in chaps, Stetson, spurs and boots. To Janet he was her

The saga of Janet Warrington who gave her all for the love of one of the West's worst outlaws—Harry Tracy, the Oregon death dealer!

Dealer's Mate

A TRUE FACT STORY

Prince Charming. A whirlwind courtship began. The rodeo moved on without him. In wooing this beautiful girl, he spent all of his prize money. Before long he was broke. But it had been worth it—those days of love, those evenings of rapture held under the trees of the Warrington estate. They became engaged and when he found himself without funds, Janet offered him money.

But at that time Harry Tracy possessed a great deal of self-respect. He refused to accept her aid, deciding to return West and make his fortune. When able to support his heiress in the kind of luxury to which she was accustomed, he would send for her. After a night of rapturous love, he departed for the West, leaving her at the depot with his loving kiss hot on her trembling lips.

Letters came to her later. Letters telling of his increasing fortunes. She was thrilled. What did she care now if her stern old father disinherited her if she married her cowboy? Harry was making good.

Harry was, but not honorably. His letters deceived her. Instead of building up a fortune through honest endeavor, Harry was rustling cattle around Billings, with one Hank Phillips, noted rustler, as his sidekick. Selling their stolen stock to an unscrupulous cattle buyer, they made big money until the Billings sheriff got on their trail. Harry, a dead shot in either hand with six-shooters, retaliated by killing a deputy.

JANET had no idea what was going on in the life of her man. Perhaps it would have made no difference. She slept with his letters beneath her pillow and dreamed of the day when they would be together again. Then for a time she heard nothing from him. Apprehensively she waited and wept. Six months later she received word. Harry was at Cripple Creek, Colorado, superintending the development of a gold mine he said he had discovered.

Innocently she believed him. In reality, Harry was holding up stages carrying gold shipments to the banks. A killing drove him to new fields and in time he landed in Oregon with his twin six-guns flaming furious and frequent against law and order.

Then Janet received another letter. It broke her heart, but only served to increase her wild love for her brave buckaroo. He wrote that he had been arrested in Portland on suspicion of robbery, claiming it was a case of mistaken identity. Would she hurry there and identify him?

Janet would—even at the cost of all family ties. Her father warned her bluntly that if she left his household for this lowly cow person he would cut her off without a penny. Throwing away a fortune and parental protection, she took what money she had saved from her allowance and boarded the first West-bound train from Chicago.

It was a stunned girl who reached Portland to learn that the man of her heart and choice had deceived her. Instead of being an innocent victim of mistaken identity, he had just been convicted of murder. She was told by jail attaches that he was known as "The Oregon Death Dealer" who, in almost every one of his long string of robberies, had killed a man. Incredulously she demanded the truth from Harry. He confessed to her, claiming that he did it all for her and if she really loved him, what did it matter what he had done?

Furthermore, he begged her to smuggle him a gun and help him shoot his way to freedom. Once free, he told her, he would take what gold he had hidden away and flee with her to South America where they could live happily. Holding her as close to him as he could through the bars of his cell, he pressed his warm lips to her ear, giving whispered word-pictures of how happy he could make her in South America. Cached away in the hills he had a fortune in gold hidden. It would see them through the rest of their days.

She listened, but no longer thrilled. The world had suddenly crashed around her. She remembered that her father had disinherited her. She could not return to his protection. Besides, she loved Harry in spite of it all. He was her common-law mate. She felt it her duty to stick to him regardless, but she could not decide. Leaving him with his kisses smothering her lips, she had gone to her room to decide.

All that night she lay on her bed and struggled for a decision. When morning came she was resolved. She rushed to the jail to tell him that her life and love was his forever, only to find that he had been hustled away for execution at the Salem Penitentiary.

She became frantic. Her man was to be executed at dawn two weeks hence, she was informed. Something snapped inside of her like a bow-string. Her soul cried out for the life of the man she loved. No tears now. Her face was lined with grim determination. If they killed her beloved

they would have to kill her, too! Rushing back to her hotel she packed hastily and hurried to Salem. Posing as his sister she was given permission to visit him at all hours.

His demands became more insistent, his kisses more frenzied. She just had to smuggle him a gun. If she loved him she had to help him in a break for liberty. Forever after they would be happy together in a distant land. He had it all planned out. But Janet needed no urging. She was resolved. Her man must go free! She was determined to die if necessary to find happiness with him!

BUT how was she to smuggle him a gun? The guards were ever alert. Then she hit upon a plan. For a week she made daily visits to him, always bringing him some dainty food like a cake, a pie or a loaf of bread of her own baking. After the first few inspections, the guards grew less alert. Finally they did not bother to break open the cakes to see if a gun was concealed there. Watching all this, she finally baked a larger cake than usual. In it she hid a short-barreled six-gun and some cartridges. The guards were unsuspicious. The gun was smuggled to Harry. In gratitude he smothered her face with kisses and whispered to her to be ready to flee the moment he came for her.

She returned to her room over a millinery shop. Next morning hell broke loose in the prison. With his smuggled gun Harry disarmed the guards. The arms were transferred to other prisoners. A wholesale break sent death and tragedy crashing through the prison. Guards were murdered ruthlessly. Tracy himself killed Guards Jones, Farrell, Tiffany and Ross! So desperate was he that life meant nothing. Before sleepy little Salem could bat one eye, The Oregon Death Dealer was loose and running wild.

Once outside the prison walls he forced a rancher to change clothes with him. Taking his horse he slipped through armed posses and reached Janet. She was ready to flee with him. They delayed just long enough for a few rapturous moments of love. Happiness was complete for her then. Her man was free! She could see nothing wrong in what she had done. There could be nothing wrong when love was so tender and ardent. She was in her man's arms. That was all that mattered.

Abandoning the horse, he fled with her on foot toward the coast. A posse cut their trail and hung on. In desperation he told Janet to go on to Portland and meet him there. They parted with no time for an embrace. The posse cornered him in a lumber yard. He fought his way clear. From then on he left a trail of blood.

Like a rabid wolf he ranged everywhere, killing, robbing, fighting to break through a cordon that had been thrown around the whole county. Meanwhile, Janet reached Portland and waited. But the wait was long. She spent many bitter hours weeping and praying.

Her prayers for his return to her went unanswered. She kept herself in readiness for the moment when he would come.

But Harry Tracy never returned to her. A posse finally closed in on him at the Goldfinch Ranch. A sharp battle ensued for more than half an hour. He took refuge in a barn and lived up to his reputation to the last. The Oregon Death Dealer! He was deadly with his guns and might have won the uneven battle but for one thing—exhaustion of ammunition.

HIS guns were hot in his hands when he discovered that he had but one cartridge remaining. Realizing that Janet was gone from his life forever now, that he could not escape capture and a noose, he blew out his brains with his last shell. The news of his death broke Janet, body and spirit. Unsuspected of having been the cause of the jail-break, she drifted back to Chicago where, it is said, she took her own life in a fit of despondency that she might be with her mate in spirit.

Just as the horse started to buck, the gunman in the street opened fire.

The sheriff and the ace gunslick of a killer's crew met in the middle of that street—and death awaited the outcome!

SIGNED ON AS A KILLER

by GRATTON BOONE

SPIKE MAGLONE was riding in to Ucross on a mission of death. His orders had been explicit: "Find the leader of the Diamond B gunnies and drop him!" It was Spike's first venture as a paid killer. He had been chosen because he was a stranger in Ucross—did not even know the man who was to be his victim.

With that reckless disregard of danger that had made his name a by-word north of the Pecos, Spike had taken the job. But it was not to his liking. . . . An imported

killer . . . His soul rebelled at deliberate murder . . . Many times he had halted on the trail, torn with indecision. But the lure of adventure found him easy prey.

MaGlone had garbed himself in hand-stamped chaps, silk shirt, new Stetson, fancy-stitched boots. A flash bound to attract attention. That was what he wanted. Gun-slingers are a jealous lot. The Diamond B gunny would quickly show his hand. Spike MaGlone made no pretense of riding the off trails. But he had been warned to enter Ucross stealthily. Sheriff Tom Hardy was hard—and fast with his gun.

At the stockyards just outside the one-story cowtown something happened. MaGlone's quick ear caught no movement in the purple August twilight. But his rangy bay mount snorted, shied violently. Before the rider could snap straight in the saddle and recover a lost stirrup, the brute's nose was buried between its fetlocks. It hit the street of Ucross in a gravel-flinging lunge.

Spike's chances for an unobtrusive entrance went rocketing. From the vortex of the horse's clevis body Spike caught glimpses of people coming on a run. Above his mount's foghorn bawls he heard shouts. But he was powerless. The best he ever got with that bay was a fifty-fifty break.

PLEAS, curses, threats availed him nothing. The brute only curved its back higher to the sky, swapped ends, spun like a top. Spike's other stirrup went flapping. He grabbed for leather, picked up a handful of dirt instead.

Came a roar of laughter. A lean terrier of a man, with hard, weather-pitted face, bow-legged up, yelling.

"It's ag'in the law to pitch your hoss in town. You leather-pounders have got to learn you can't endanger the lives of innocent— Who the hell are you?"

Spike glared up through swirling dust. Not at the bandy-legged man—whom instinct warned him was the sheriff—but for the one who led the laughter in the gathering crowd.

"Damn your soul, Hellcat," Spike snarled at the horse, as he sat up in the street to wipe the grime from his gravel-peeled face.

Again the hooting laughter. And again one guffaw louder than the rest. Spike's face went almost the color of his red hair. Even his smoky eyes looked and saw red in the twilight.

"You're all the same, you mail-order flashes," Sheriff Hardy exploded. "Your room's better than your company—unless you've got legitimate business. Who are you?"

The boiling cowpuncher got stiffly to his feet amid uproarious laughter. He slapped the dust from his shirt and chaps, recovered his hat, and secured the bridle reins of the big bay, which had edged back to regard him.

"Spike MaGlone."

"Puncher?"

"Rafter R."

"That black-balled spread! That's enough to bar you from any self-respectin' town. The Rafter R's at the bottom of all the trouble on this range. After that ruckus with the Diamond B last week there'll be murder warrants out fer every one of its ridin' guns. Your heard the Diamond B was shippin'. That's why you come. Snortin' fer trouble—well, I'm warnin' you—"

"Say, cowboy, why didn't you get a mail-order course in ridin' along with them foxy chaps?" The taunt from someone in the crowd was followed by a raucous laugh.

MaGlone, however, was now able to locate the fellow in the dusk—a big, black-muzzled man; repulsive, coldly dangerous. Dropping the bay's reins, he pushed through the crowd to plant himself spread-legged before the stranger.

"Mebbeso I should have, ranny." As Spike gritted the words he experienced one of those singular flashes of having been in the same place before, characters and setting similar. He was vaguely conscious of having met this fellow somewhere. But—

Blazing anger is not conducive to memory searching. His mind shuttled back.

"Mebbeso if you've finished your mail-order course in ridin', this hoss here is your meat," he rasped out. "Me, I just figure to break even with him. He gets me this time, I get him next. But I'm holdin' fifty bucks that says you can't—"

"Hoss?" The big fellow's thick, cracked lips smirked sneeringly. His eyes glittered. Even his loud, metallic voice rang familiar to Spike. Still, he could not—

"A bet here'll only cause trouble," the sheriff cut in with a yell. "Never knowed no Rafter R rannyhan to—"

"Lay off the Rafter R." Spike's voice was freezing. "When you get the straight of that ruckus with the Diamond B you'll learn the Rafter R was right. Fer as its ridin'

guns are concerned, if you had 'em in Ucross you wouldn't be overrun with varmints. Ner lousy Diamond B guntoters. We'd quarantine an' fumigate." His thumb dropped down to hook in his cartridge belt, near the butt of a thong-tied forty-five six-shooter. His freckled face jerked into hard lines, square jaws bulging. His lithe, muscle-corded body went taut. It was the Spike MaGlone the Pecos knew—and feared.

THE smoky eyes that gauged the stranger were shot with points of flame. "You heard me, jasper. Fifty bucks you can't throw a leg across this Hellcat hoss. Make motions or quit brayin'."

"There'll be no pitchin' in this street," warned the sheriff.

"All hell can't stop me from showin' this brayin' jackass up," Spike challenged. "Here's Hellcat, jasper—the hoss with a different brand to ever' square inch of him—if that means anything to you."

If the black-muzzled man feared either Spike or the bay, he gave no outward sign. Instead he shrugged his massive shoulders, and his thick lips curled away from yellowed teeth. His glittering, beady eyes kept close watch on Spike. "It's a bet. No Rafter R yet ever bluffed Blackie Rogers—of the Diamond B."

"Blackie Rogers? Diamond B?" Spike exploded. Was this the man he was to—"Be so after awhile they'll have to kill off their cows to pasture their hands," he snorted contemptuously. "I see now how the sheriff got the idea that Rafter R guns was crackin' wild. You seen to that, Rogers. It was your Diamond B layout that got us black-balled, spread the order to shoot the Rafter R guns on sight. Here's a chance to get yourself one, jasper."

Sheriff Hardy bounded between them, rammed a gun into Spike's ribs. "You're under arrest, feller. You can't—"

"Soon as this walloper takes a whirl at my hoss, I'll talk to you," Spike agreed hotly. "Climb aboard, black mug. Throw your Diamond B mud hooks into this bay an' learn somethin' about hosses."

The horse now edged up inquisitively to stand spread-legged, one ear cocked forward, the other plastered back. He peeled an eye, snorted as Rogers seized the bridle reins. Then he did a jig step. The Diamond B man cheek-reined him and started to step across.

On that instant the Hellcat cut loose. A lunge lifted him onto the board walk. A plate-glass window crashed in the store, showered the scattering crowd with slicing splinters. Smashed planks flew up. The high false front of the pool hall rocked with the impact of half a ton of plunging brawn and temper.

Then the bawling outlaw was back in the street, its snaky body twisting like a side-winder, front legs stiff as crowbars, hind legs dangling, bull-frogged.

The sheriff was the first to reach the prostrate Blackie Rogers. They carried him into Wall Eye Jansen's "Last Chance" bar, stretched him on a table. He came to slowly, shuddered, started up, roweling the air.

Again a raucous laugh burst forth. One hoot, louder than the rest, lingered tauntingly. But now no one need search for the owner of the laugh. He stood well out in front. It was Spike MaGlone.

"Come on, you wallopers. Drinks fer the crowd on this Diamond B tough!" Spike recklessy thumbed the skinny ribs of Wall Eye Jansen, the gaunt, evil-faced owner of the dive, who had moved in close and was watching him like a hawk. "Mud in your eye, jasper! To the ridin' guns of the Rafter—" He stopped, spun about. The crowd had melted away. He stood alone at one end of an open lane, flanked on either side by white tragic faces. Opposite him were six punchers, ugly and flinteyed.

SHERIFF HARDY broke the sudden, hot stillness. "You Diamond B punchers—there'll be no shootin'— This here gent, I'll tend to him. He's my prisoner—"

"Diamond B's, huh?" Spike grinned coldly. "More new hands. Them ain't the wallopers the Rafter R smoked up last week. An' I thought we'd took a gun poll." His glazed eyes darted to the sheriff. "How do you figure I'm your prisoner?"

"Fer pitchin' your hoss in the street. Investigation. Safe-keeping. Any damned thing to keep from— Out of the way, jaspers!" Hardy seized Spike's arm. "Come on."

The Diamond B crew parted suddenly. Hardy pushed MaGlone through. Then they were outside in the street, now dark and deserted.

"What's the play?" Spike wrenched loose angrily. "A feller gets a chance to have a little fun—"

"A little fun—they numbered you eight to one!"

"There's only six."

"Don't forgit Rogers— And there's another one around Ucross somewheres. Fun, hell, it's suicide. On top of that other ruckus with the Diamond B you orter—"

"They started it. They imported gunmen a-purpose to shoot our spread off the range. But they hit a snag."

"An' you jaspers killed two of 'em. You orter be steerin' clear of trouble 'stead ot jumpin' right back into it."

"We don't have to stand close-snubbed an' be shot at by Diamond B's. But them ducks in there. That Rogers. Are you dead sure they're Diamond B's?"

"All eight of 'em. Been loadin' Diamond B steers fer two days. Shipped the last not an hour ago. They're all ready to pull out for the ranch. An' you—straddle your hoss an' sift or go to jail."

Without a word Spike strode to where his horse was dozing in the darkened street, weight on three legs. Vaulting into the saddle, he got the jump on the animal. This time the brute only made a half-hearted lunge, whirled and loped away into the night.

Spike's fury was evident as he rode. Disregarding Hardy's shouts of warning, he put the bay down the street recklessly, roweled around the stockyards to pick up the outbound trail. Again the bay snorted, shied violently as it had done coming. But the rider scarcely noticed. His mood was dark, ugly. He drove the rowels deeper. The bronco straightened up, stiff-legged, mincing.

"Damn that sheriff," Spike growled. "By runnin' me out he's got them Diamond B's thinkin' they put a whizzer on me. Stampeded Spike MaGlone. But that Rogers. What makes him so familiar?"

He racked his memory. MaGlone knew every cowtail from Billings to Los Vegas. He had made one trip even farther south—to Texas. That was after southern steers—Wet cattle, he had discovered. They had picked them up in Los Juntos. The deal had been legitimate as far as his spread was concerned. But later—

"I've got it, ole Hellcat!" The bay lunged wildly as Spike jerked straight-legged in his stirrups. "Rogers was the lobo that unloaded them wet steers. Black Jumbo, they called him. He killed the waddy tryin' to square the deal fer us down

WESTERN

10¢ LOVE STORY

ROMANCES OF THE RANGELAND

Poignant, gripping romance crosses trails with smashing feud-gun adventure in the memorable story of Neva Winters, salty daughter of the West who led her clan to the death against the man she had pledged herself to marry! Don't miss this great feature-length novel of the old frontier, "Love Is Not for Feudists" by Ryder Sage. Also in this star-packed December issue of WESTERN LOVE STORY are dramatic novelets and short stories by Dawn West, Hapsburg Liebe, Zane Warbridge, Ed Earl Repp, Frankie Lee Weed, Lulita Crawford Pritchett and other favorite authors of the romances of the West of yesteryear.

DECEMBER ISSUE NOW ON SALE

WITH **FOOT-SAL**

Thousands of men and women suffer daily from irritating foot sores and blisters, causing extreme discomfort and impediment.

"FOOT-SAL" OFFERS QUICK RELIEF

This remarkable salve preparation has been specially developed to heal and sooth common foot ailments, such as rough, cracked skin between the toes, Achilles heel, Athletes' Foot and other surface sores.

AVOID INFECTION

Raw and blistered tissues are open to infectious germs—a constant menace to one's health.

Apply Foot-Sal morning and night at the first sign of any irritation. Foot-Sal goes to the root of the soreness and destroys the breeding germs. It stops itching and neutralizes the perspiration condition which breeds Athlete's Foot.

4 POINTS TO REMEMBER

- AVOID TIGHT-FITTING SHOES.
- BATHE FREQUENTLY.
- CHANGE HOSE OFTEN.
- APPLY FOOT-SAL.

Foot-Sal is the ideal foot application. It is odorless and naturally non-irritating. There is nothing finer for soothing and healing broken tissues, for it leaves the skin soft, whole and smooth.

GET RELIEF TODAY—*The "Foot-Sal" Way*

Send $1.00 for regular size jar. We pay the postage. Satisfaction guaranteed or money promptly refunded.

RUSH COUPON BELOW!

FOOT-SAL COMPANY, Dept. S.1.
41 Union Square, Room 402U, New York, N. Y.

I enclose $1.00. Please rush my jar of "Foot-Sal" postpaid. If not satisfied I will return unused balance for full refund.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY..... STATE.....

there in Los Juntos. I tried to collect the rewards fer him."

He whirled the startled animal and headed back toward Ucross. A short distance and he jerked rein.

A muffled detonation shook the sagebrush flats that encircled the village. There was a moment of thick silence. Then pandemonium broke loose in town. Orange-tailed bullets went rocketing through the streets. Lights flashed. Shouts, cries, curses arose. Spike gave the bay rein. It pivoted around the stockyards, snorted, shied in midair.

Wham!

Hot lead shrieked past Spike's head, so close the concussion made him dizzy. Skylined, he started to hurl himself from the saddle. Hellcat saved him the trouble. The terrified horse was gone pitching, bawling, back up the street of Ucross—riderless. Spike sprawled headlong in the darkness.

When the prostrate cowboy could control his labored breath and spinning head, he found his forty-five, dove into the sheltering gloom of the stockyards to lay, straining for a moment, for a glimpse of the unknown gunman. Where in hell was he?

DOWN the street came a thunder of hoofs. Mounted men flashed by. Huge, misshapen monsters, momentarily skylined. Came a heavy thud. Something hit the ground inside the yards. Then the riders were swallowed up in the darkness.

Spike raised up cautiously. In the wan light he glimpsed a man vanishing into the shadows on the opposite side of the yards. His gun flew up. Caution held it silent.

"There's somethin' been pulled in town," he reasoned. "A robbery, mebbeso. There's been a lookout posted inside these yards since sundown. That's what Hellcat has been shyin' at." Thought of the horse brought him upright in the darkness, hugging a post. From the village there still came the rattle of gunfire, hoarse shouts of men. Others were bearing down upon his direction.

Then he located the bay, found the trailing bridle reins, started to mount. But the frantic animal seemed possessed. Before Spike could step across, it pitched from under him. He was back on the ground.

He fell to cursing aloud, violently.

"Who's there?"

Spike recognized the voice that broke in on him. "It's me, sheriff—Spike MaGlone." He got to his feet. "What's all the ruckus?"

"Come on out of there," Hardy rasped. "An' come with your hands up."

"What's wrong?" Spike detached himself from the shadows and advanced fearlessly.

"The Ucross bank's been robbed. Safe blowed. Ten thousand in currency stole. Where's your hoss?" A whinny out of the gloom was his answer.

"Which way, sheriff?" Spike demanded.

"To town!"

"But them hold-ups wouldn't stay—"

"You're goin' to jail. That bank robbery—"

"You run me out of town before that robbery."

"You ain't out of town, are you? You never got beyond these stock pens. Just about as far as the hold-up."

"That damned bay," Spike growled in argument.

"That's got by once today."

"Have it your own way," contemptuously. "But who was that bunch of riders you was chasin'?"

"Wasn't chasin' 'em. That's the Diamond B crew. They was on their hosses, ready to leave town when the bank was robbed. They volunteered an' I deputized 'em to ride that hot trail fer me."

SPIKE found his elusive horse, swung aboard. The bay, quiet now, moved docilely alongside the sheriff. Then they were in the street. Things were in an uproar. Dark figures bobbed about. Lanterns flashed. Shouts, cries, wild orders. Wilder disorder.

They rode to the jail without further conversation. Hardy dismounted. Spike caught the dull glint of gun steel in the gloom.

"I don't know nothin' about that bank robbery," contended the puncher. "Because I'm a Rafter R gun you—"

"That's just it," Hardy shoved his six-shooter back into its holster. "You're a ridin' gun of the Rafter R. You have to be tough to belong to that crew. That ruckus with the Diamond B last week proved that."

"You're the one who's braggin' about it."

"I'm talkin' turkey, jasper. There's something I ain't told you. The cashier was workin' last night down to the bank. Behind drawn blinds. He was drilled. Slick as a whistle through the heart. Whoever done that shootin' was the best lead-slinger—"

"An' because I'm a stranger I get a rep

Sells 19 Features In Six Months

"I have sold, up to date, nineteen features to the Detroit Free Press and have been made their correspondent here," writes Mrs. Leonard Sanders of 218 Union St., Milford, Mich., on completing the N. I. A. course. Her skilful handling of feature stories was the reason given by the editor for her appointment. Mrs. Sanders' first feature was sold less than four months after she enrolled with N. I. A.

How do *you* know *you can't* WRITE?

Have you ever tried?

Have you ever attempted even the least bit of training, under competent guidance?

Or have you been sitting back, as it is so easy to do, waiting for the day to come some time when you will awaken, all of a sudden, to the discovery, "I *am* a writer"?

If the latter course is the one of your choosing, you probably *never will write*. Lawyers must be law clerks. Doctors must be internes. Engineers must be draftsmen. We all know that, in our times, the egg does come before the chicken.

It is seldom that any one becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their background and their confidence as nothing else could.

That is why the Newspaper Institute of America bases its writing instruction on journalism—continuous writing—the training that has produced so many successful authors.

Learn to write by writing

NEWSPAPER Institute training is based on the New York Copy-Desk Method. It starts and keeps you writing in your own home, on your own time. Week by week you receive actual assignments, just as if you were right at work on a great metropolitan daily. Your writing is *individually* corrected and constructively criticised. A group of men, whose combined newspaper experience totals more than 200 years, are responsible for this instruction. Under such sympathetic guidance, you will find that (instead of vainly trying to copy some one else's writing tricks) you are rapidly developing your own distinctive, self-flavored style—undergoing an experience that has a thrill to it and which at the same time develops in you the power to make your feelings articulate.

Many people who *should* be writing become awe-struck by fabulous stories about millionaire authors and, therefore, give little thought to the $25, $50 and $100 or more that can often be earned for material that takes little time to write—stories, articles on business, fads, travels, sports, recipes, etc.—things that can easily be turned out in leisure hours, and often on the impulse of the moment.

A chance to test yourself

We have prepared a unique Writing Aptitude Test. This tells you whether you possess the fundamental qualities necessary to successful writing—acute observation, dramatic instinct, creative imagination, etc. You'll enjoy taking this test. The coupon will bring it, without obligation. Newspaper Institute of America, One Park Avenue, New York.

Free

Newspaper Institute of America
One Park Avenue, New York

Send me, without cost or obligation, your *Writing Aptitude Test* and further information about writing for profit.

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }

Address.....

(All correspondence confidential. No salesman will call on you.)

31L368

World's Greatest Collection of Strange & Secret Photographs

NOW you can travel round the world with the most daring adventurers. You can see with your own eyes, the weirdest peoples on earth. You witness the strangest customs of the red, white, brown, black and yellow races. You attend their startling rites, their mysterious practices. They are all assembled for you in these five great volumes of the SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND.

600 LARGE PAGES

Here is the World's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs. Here are Exotic Photos from Europe, Harem Photos from Africa, Torture Photos, Female Photos, Marriage Photos from Asia, Oceania, and America, and hundreds of others. There are almost 600 LARGE PAGES OF PHOTOGRAPHS, each page 62 square inches!

1,000 REVEALING PHOTOS

You see actual courtship practiced in every quarter of the world. You see magic and mystery in queer lands where the foot of a white man has rarely trod. You see Oriental modes of marriage and female slavery in China, Japan, India, etc. Through the close-up of the camera you witness the exotic habits of every continent and female customs in America, Europe, etc. You are bewildered by ONE THOUSAND LARGE PHOTOGRAPHS, including 130 full-page photos, and thrilled by the hundreds of short stories that describe them.

Contents of 5-Volume Set
VOLUME 1
The Secret Album of Africa
VOLUME 2
The Secret Album of Europe
VOLUME 3
The Secret Album of Asia
VOLUME 4
The Secret Album of America
VOLUME 5
The Secret Album of Oceania

5 PICTURE-PACKED VOLUMES

Specimen Photos
Dress & Undress Round the World
Various Secret Societies
Civilized Love vs. Savage
Strange Crimes, Criminals
Flagellation and Slavery
Omens, Totems & Taboos
Mysterious Customs
Female Slave Hunters
1,000 Strange & Secret Photos

The SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND consists of five picture-packed volumes (solidly bound together for convenient reading). Dip into any one of these volumes, and as you turn its daring pages, you find it difficult to tear yourself away. Here, in story and uncensored photo, is the WORLD'S GREATEST COLLECTION OF STRANGE AND SECRET PHOTOGRAPHS, containing everything from Female Beauty Round the World to the most Mysterious Cults and Customs. These hundreds and hundreds of large pages will give you days and nights of thrilling instruction.

SEND NO MONEY

Simply sign & mail the coupon. Remember, each of the 5 Volumes is 9½ inches high, and, opened, over a foot wide! Remember also that this 5-Volume Set formerly sold for $10. And it is bound in expensive "life-time" cloth. Don't put this off. Fill out the coupon, drop it in the next mail, and receive this huge work at once.

METRO PUBLICATIONS
70 5th Ave., Dept. 9901 New York.

Send me "The Secret Museum of Mankind" (5 great volumes bound together). I will pay postman $1.98, plus postage on arrival. If not delighted, I will return book in 5 days for full refund of $1.98. (No foreign orders accepted at this low price!)

Name .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

☐ CHECK HERE if you are enclosing $1.98, thus saving mailing costs. Same Money-Back Guarantee.

as a reg'lar hell-bender with a gun."

"The Rafter R don't hire blind men to sight their guns," Sheriff Hardy snorted. "Your flashy clothes mark you as a crack with a forty-five. An' the feller who done that shootin' is the slickest gun-slinger ever to hit this range. If you didn't do it you'd better look to your laurels."

"Meanin'?"

"That's why I'm lockin' you up. If there is another gunman he's hangin' around Ucross to get a crack at you. If folks knowed I found you down at the stockyards right after that robbery—"

Spike's hand flashed down, came up with his iron. A movement so swift it almost baffled sight. "Let 'em try lynchin' me if they feel lucky. An' that gun-slinger—I'd just like to—"

"You're drawin' on the law," Hardy warned him testily.

"Damn the law. I didn't stick up that bank. An' I ain't— If anybody asks what become of me, tell 'em you run me out of town before the robbery." Spike whirled his horse, bolted into the night. The sheriff sat stock still, staring after him.

AN HOUR passed. Ucross still shouted, cursed. Horses bounded back and forth. Hardy was among those who beat the brush. He had left the jail shortly after Spike had ridden away. Yet, oddly enough, he made no attempt to follow the strange Rafter R gun. In fact, a smug smile framed his lips.

"Wonder if it'll work?" he chuckled as he rode away to join the man-hunt. "If my hunch is right—"

The night wore on. Gradually quiet was restored. Outwardly Ucross was peaceful, slept.

Then of a sudden, two shots came roaring out of Wall Eye Jansen's Last Chance bar. Two shots that were so close together that one seemed an echo of the other.

Riding back up the dark street, after a weary and futile search, Hardy roweled toward the dive. He threw himself from the saddle, bounded across the walk and crashed through the swinging doors.

At one side of the big resort Spike MaGlone stood as though transfixed. Smoke eddied ceilingward from his hot-barreled six-shooter. Slumped across a poker table, head buried in outflung arms, was Blackie Rogers. Grim-faced, terror-stricken punchers were plastered against the walls. The bar was lined with rigid cowboys who

seemed suddenly to have died on their feet. The moment was without breath or motion; silent, deadly, ominous.

Hardy could sense the relief, yet the hostility, with which his entrance was greeted. Wall Eye Jansen was the first to move. He threw down a towel, started edging from behind the bar.

Sizing things up with a precision born of many desperate encounters, Hardy was certain that Spike was no particular friend of Wall Eye Jansen. He also knew that any attempt to take him—a stranger though he apparently was—in the nerve-taut crowd would precipitate a gun fight.

When, presently, he spoke, the officer's voice blasted the silence like a bombshell.

"Come on, MaGlone." His gaze focused on the Rafter R gunny. Yet from the corner of his eye he watched Jansen rounding the end of the bar.

Spike smiled. A cold, frozen smile.

"Why don't you take me? You run me out of town. You told me to stay. You've arrested me ever' time I've turned around tonight. Make it stick. You're gunnin' fer us Rafter R's. Me specially. I croaked Blackie Rogers. He asked fer it. Even these hoss thieves will back me up." He threw a contemptuous nod at the stunned crowd, slid his forty-five back into his holster. "Take me, if you feel lucky."

"I'm runnin' this joint, sheriff." The rasping voice of Wall Eye cut in. "I'll be responsible fer this walloper. Ever'body's nervous now. Lay off. Get the hell out of here!"

Hardy's tanned cheek paled. His eyes shifted to catch the full movement of Wall Eye's hand, which hung near the butt of a revolver stuck in the waistband of his trousers.

A direct challenge to draw, and a warning to get out, were wormwood for a man of Hardy's caliber. But he was no fool. He realized that the odds were too great, the situation beyond his single-handed power. Wall Eye would shoot at the first break. The strain was tightening every nerve to the snapping point; every nerve, save those, possibly, of the cold and smiling Spike himself.

Seconds dragged by; tense, horrible seconds. Wall Eye's fingers hovered just above his gun butt. Again the sheriff's gaze sought Spike's. Hardy, the gunman, looked beyond the Rafter R man's insolent smile and plumbed the depths of his soul. What he saw determined his course. He delib-

Does Your Hair Reflect Health and Beauty?

Use KOTALKO

To Help Hair Growth

Is your hair soft, lustrous, beautiful? Or is it thin, stringy, faded? Does it enhance your appearance—or spoil your looks?

You are lucky if your hair is rich in the elements that make for normal growth.

But if it falls out excessively; if you have flaky dandruff, or if there are signs of approaching baldness, send for a sample of KOTALKO, or buy a full supply at the drug store.

Thousands recommend KOTALKO the distinguished hair proprietary, because it is a valuable aid to scalp energy which remains the only source of hair growth and the sole resistant against preventable baldness.

Do not let scalp fatigue dull your hair, dim your poularity, or interfere with your charm. Safeguard your hair! Kotalko is sold at drug stores everywhere.

GLAMOROUS

ROMANTIC

FREE BOX To prove the efficacy of Kotalko for men's, women's and children's hair. Use coupon.

KOTALKO CO., A-69, General P. O., New York

Name.....

Full Address.....

.....

UNLUCKY? UNHAPPY?

in games of chance, love, money, or business? Thousands believe that the mysterious power of genuine live lodestones can bring good fortune and protection from harm. Allegedly carried by the occults as a so-called

POWERFUL LUCKY CHARM

one alleged to attract good luck, love, money, happiness, and the other to prevent bad luck, evil, and distress. Now you too can get a pair of these amazing curios. Draw, compel, attract. EVERY PAIR GUARANTEED live. Sold as extra highly magnetic genuine lodestones on money-back guarantee. Complete with carrying case and important information, only $1.97 pair. We pay postage if money is sent with order, or order C. O. D. Rush! ARABIAN CO., 2 Albany St., Dept. 1-DA, New York, N. Y.

FOR SALE

Cheapest prices in America. Guaranteed to please or money back. Twenty-five years in business. Eight rooms of display. Indian Relics, Beadwork, Coins, Stamps, Bills, Minerals, Fossils, Gems, Miniatures, Old Glass, Dolls, Prints, Autographs, Medals, Idols, Old Pistols, Edged Weapons, Old West Photos, Books, Indian Jewelry, Rugs, Baskets, Pottery, Ivory Idols, African Relics, Oriental Mexican War Bonnets, Beaded Buckskin Suits, Cowboy Goods, Sea Curios, Mounted Animals, Magazines, Stamp Covers, Old Banks, Paperweights, Vases, Pitchers, Tokens, Revenues. Catalogues on above 10c. LEMLEY CURIO STORE, INDIAN MUSEUM, Northbranch, Kansas.

GUARANTEED TIRES!
GOODYEAR-GOODRICH
FIRESTONE-U.S. and
Other Standard Makes

FREE! LANTERN
With Every 2 Tires ordered

Complete with batteries and newest type reflector bulb. Ready for instant use. Strong, steady light. Useful everywhere. Order now.

World's Lowest TIRE PRICES

Tire users by the thousands all over the U.S.A. vouch for the Long Hard Service of our Standard Brand tires reconditioned with high grade materials and latest methods by our tire experts. Our 21 years experience makes it possible to offer tires at lowest prices, with legal agreement to replace at ½ price any tire that fails to give 12 Mos. Service.

EVERY TIRE GUARANTEED!

BALLOON TIRES

Size Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21	$2.15	$1.05
28x4.50-20	2.35	1.05
30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.65	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
30x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
6.00-16	3.75	1.45

REGULAR CORD TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3½	$2.35	$0.95
31x4	2.95	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	2.95	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES
(High Pressure)

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$4.25	$1.65
32x5	5.95	1.75
34x5	4.25	1.75
32x6	7.95	2.95
36x6	9.95	4.45

Size	Tires	Tubes
33x4½	$3.45	$1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

Size	Tires	Tubes
34x7	$10.95	$4.65
38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
6.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95

Size	Tires	Tubes
7.50-20	$6.95	$3.75
8.25-20	8.85	4.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.65
9.75-20	13.95	6.45

ALL OTHER SIZES

DEALERS WANTED

SEND ONLY $1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. ($3.00 on each Truck Tire.) We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct 5 per cent if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we may substitute brands if necessary. ALL TUBES BRAND NEW—GUARANTEED—

PERRY-FIELD TIRE & RUBBER CO.
2329-30 S. Michigan Av., Dept. DAG-6 Chicago, Ill.

A BRAND NEW $2.00 BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL IS IN THE JAN. ISSUE OF

DOUBLE ACTION WESTERN

NOW ON SALE

THE MARSHAL OF BLACK ROCK

By G. W. BARRINGTON

The leading author of the West of yesteryear

ALSO

THE GUN-MEDICO FROM HELL'S CORNERS

By ED EARL REPP

erately swung his back on Spike MaGlone and faced Wall Eye Jansen.

"There's been a killin' here, Wall Eye," he said frozenly. "I'm under oath to arrest a killer no matter whose place he's in. MaGlone," he threw the name back over his shoulder, "we're goin'—"

A forty-five rocketed flame from the crowd. The pendant lamp above the sheriff flared up and burst with a splintering crash. Instantly the place was a riot of gunfire and flying glass. With the flash, Hardy drew and fired. Not at Spike MaGlone. But at Wall Eye Jansen, whose fingers had closed about his gun. Blong! Hardy saw Wall Eye go down. But before he could trigger his forty-five again, a pain seared his arm, spun him about. He grunted. His knees sagged, buckled, and he dropped. The swaying, cursing mob was upon him, crushing the breath from his body, trampling him beneath heavy, sharp-heeled boots. Above the bedlam he caught the sound of shots. Swift shots, like a Gatling gun. Then darkness engulfed him.

SHERIFF HARDY was vaguely conscious of being dragged through the swinging doors. The noise of the fight, still raging within, came faintly above the sluicing roar of his own hot blood against his ears. He struggled to rise.

"Lay still till you get your wind. Let 'em scrap it out. They're just killin' each other off. Savin' you the trouble."

The law officer peered up at the puncher bending over him in the darkness. It was Spike MaGlone. Somehow he had known it was this fellow.

"I know you're wonderin' what I'm doin' here when you come a-purpose to arrest me," Spike snarled. "But—when I seen you go down, I just had to cut loose. I ain't got no love fer you. But I've got a danged sight less fer hoss thieves like them. An' when any hombre turns his back on Spike MaGlone, he's either plain damn fool er he's got guts."

"I read your sign," Hardy groaned. "Your eyes are on the level. That's why I turned my back. To get a crack at Wall Eye. I took a chance. You had me dead to rights if you'd of been a back-shooter."

He struggled weakly to his feet, stood swaying dizzily. "I suspected you account of your hook-up with the Rafter R. You've got gunman stickin' out all over you. You're really under arrest fer murder. But you saved my life and I won't fergit it. Pull

your freight; get off the Ucross range by dayilght. I won't start no posse till then."

"I ain't the runnin' kind." Spike's voice was warm with feeling. "You offerin' me a break like this when I know what it's costin' a man like you— But I ain't no quitter. I've got the lowdown on—"

"Just as you say." Hardy clutched his own bleeding arm. His face was ashen even in the gloom. "I can't lock you up after the way you pulled me through. But if you're still here in the mornin' I'll have to get out a warrant." His voice broke. "Them bank robbers— That Diamond B—" His voice trailed off. He groaned and pitched headlong into Spike's arms.

TWO hours later Sheriff Hardy again groped back to consciousness. His first thought was of somebody hovering about him. It was old Doc Carey, putting the finishing touches to a bandaged arm.

"Take it easy now," the doctor urged. "You'll be fit as a fiddle. No bones broken. Just sliced a couple of big veins. You're weak from loss of blood. Lay still."

"How can I?" Hardy choked. "There's been a bank robbery. Another killin' down to the Last Chance. I shot Wall Eye—"

"I heard about it." Doc went on with his work. "A fellow calling himself Spike MaGlone brought you in here, dead to the world. Said when you came to, to tell you he'd headed for the Diamond B, by way of the Rafter R, where he'd pick up the riding guns and—"

"Ridin' guns—Diamond B."

"Spike said you weren't in shape to go, so he'd just clean out that Diamond B spread for you. Wished, when you felt able, you'd ride on down there. They wouldn't need you, but—"

"Spike MaGlone? Clean out the Diamond B?" Strength born of excitement brought Hardy bolt upright. "There's all kinds of hell to pay now."

"Without that MaGlone you'd of played hell recovering that bank money."

"What are you talking about?" Hardy exploded with pain and surprise.

"MaGlone got the money back from the bank robbery.

"He played nurse while I probed for that slug in your arm. He got pretty white about the gills, but . . . he said he recognized that Blackie Rogers as a wet cattle runner he'd bumped into in Texas. And those fellows Rogers had with him. Spike

Now Test Your Voice at Home

Make

Records of your Talking or Singing Voice

Now an invention permits you to make a professional-like recording of your own singing or talking voice. Without experience you can quickly transfer your voice on phonographic records which we furnish and immediately play them and listen to them yourself. Record friends voices, orchestras, or your favorite radio broadcast.

FIND OUT IF YOU HAVE PROFESSIONAL TALENT

The movies—radio—stage in both Broadway and Hollywood are ever seeking new talent

PERHAPS YOU HAVE TALENT?

Before spending money for an audition, make a "home record" of your voice and mail it to a reliable agency you might be one of the lucky ones to find fame and success thru this easy method of bringing your talents before the proper authorities.

IT'S LOTS OF FUN, TOO!

You'll get a real thrill out of home recording. Surprise your friends by letting them hear your voice as though it were broadcast. Record a snappy talking feature. Record jokes and you will become the life of the party. Great to help train your voice and to cultivate speech—nothing to practice you start recording at once. No other mechanical or electrical devices needed. Everything necessary included. Nothing else to buy. Just sing or speak into your own phonograph after it is equipped with our home recording unit and then listen to yourself and that's all there is to it.

FREE SERVICE

If you are desirous of a screen test and want names and addresses of companies to send your records to for an audition, you will find our free guide to both Hollywood and Broadway companies very helpful . . . offered free to those who order Home Records at once.

DEALERS WRITE!

Reliable dealers are invited to write for full particulars.

COMPLETE OUTFIT ONLY $2.98

You get everything listed below for only $2.98, plus postage—there is nothing else to buy and nothing else to pay.

SEND NO MONEY! HURRY COUPON

Everything is included. Nothing else to buy and nothing else to pay. You get complete HOME RECORDING UNIT which includes special recording needle playing needles 12 two sided unbreakable records (equivalent to 24 records) Also included guide record attachment combination recording playback unit suitable for recording a skit, voice or instrument. Everything sent for only $2.98. plus postage.

Home Recording Co.
Studio E, 130 West 17th St., New York City, N. Y.

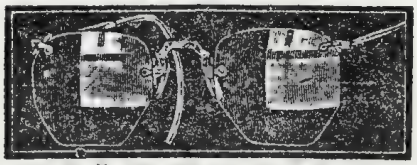
Send entire HOME RECORDING OUTFIT (including 12 two-sided records) described above by return mail. I will pay postman $2.98 plus postage on arrival. (Send cash or money order now for $3.00 and save postage.)

Name .....

Address .....

Note: Canadian and Foreign $3.00 cash with order

FIT YOUR EYEGLASSES FREE



It's easy to fit your own eye glasses by our simple, improved method. See far and near without eyestrain. Do close work, read fine print. Complete eye testers free.

SEND NO MONEY—ANSWER QUICK

We'll send you FREE 14 trial lenses and illustrations of beautiful designs and distinctive patterns for your selection. Latest styles complete only $3.85 and up. Others low as $1.98. We replace broken lenses at lowest prices.

14 TRIAL LENSES FREE

We guarantee satisfaction. 10 days' trial. Wear Vogue eyeglasses. Money promptly refunded if not satisfied. We only handle high grade single and double vision Toric Kryptok bifocal lenses ground into one solid piece of glass. 14 trial lenses. FREE. SEND TODAY.

VOGUE SPECTACLE CO., 1333 Lost Ave., Dept.A-62,Chicago, Ill

Here is relief from distressing symptoms of

CATARRH, SINUS HEAD COLDS

$1 RELIEF Treatment 25¢

When Sinus Congestions, Rhinitis, Nasal Catarrh or Head Colds cause the delicate membranes of the nasal passages to become swollen and obstructed and breathing becomes difficult, you want to regain the comfort of clear breathing as quickly as possible. HEDKLEAR Inhalator Method offers such comfort—quickly—almost instantly in many cases. HEDKLEAR works on an entirely new principle. By means of a most effective device called the HEDKLEAR Inhalator, the soothing vapors of HEDKLEAR Essence are gently forced through the nasal passages. In this way you actually "breathe away" distress and discomfort of nasal congestions. If you have never tried HEDKLEAR before, send 25c only for a full $1.00 size bottle of HEDKLEAR Essence and full facts about the HEDKLEAR Inhalator method. Address

Dearborn Products, 510 N. Dearborn, Dept. 26, Chicago

SOCIAL SECURITY PLATES

Forty Million persons are listed with the Social Security Board. Many salesmen are making a good living selling Social Security Plates. We put out a beautiful etched rich bronze plate in a leatherette case with name and social security number stamped on it. These sell easily for 50c, your commission on each order is 30c.

Send 25c for sample or particulars at no cost.

RELIABLE SALES CO., 1141 Broadway, Dept. BB, New York City

GARLIC-PARSLEY an Aid in HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Medical reports say that Garlic-Parsley concentrate has a double action in reducing high blood pressure. First, it tends to relax tightened arteries. Second, it checks or inhibits decomposition of waste matter in the bowels, a contributory cause of high blood pressure. To get concentrated garlic and parsley in odorless, tasteless form, ask your druggist for ALLIMIN Essence of Garlic-Parsley Tablets. Large box 50c; super-size money-saving package $1.00. ALLIMIN used repeatedly at regular intervals aids in reducing blood pressure and relieving headache and dizziness caused by excessively high readings. To learn what raises your blood pressure and for medical treatment consult your doctor. For free sample and booklet of valuable information on high blood pressure, write

VAN PATTEN CO., 54 W. Illinois, Dept.133, Chicago

knew they weren't Diamond B hands

"After you ordered MaGlone out of town, his horse got scared down at the stockyards. Somebody took a shot at him. While he was trying to get the lowdown on it, the trouble broke loose and he saw those Diamond B riders pass. Heard something fall inside the yards. Somebody crawled away in the dark. Those robbers had a lookout posted in the stockyards since dusk. As they rode by, after the robbery, they tossed the loot to this lookout. He doubled back to town. But MaGlone was on the job and—"

"And croaked Blackie Rogers!" Hardy's weakness vanished. He sprang to his feet. "I thought it was funny them Diamond B riders was so danged quick to act as possemen. An' there was only six of 'em. There'd been seven workin' them steers.

"I went back to Wall Eye's after I'd run Spike out of town. Rogers an' his gang had ducked. Rogers relieved that lookout, I'll bet. The robbery was timed to the second and the lookout robbed the bank. Rode right out of town with that gang I'd deputized. Damn them!"

"MaGlone left a note for you, Tom. I was too busy tending to your arm to listen, so I told him to write a letter." The doctor passed over a penciled scrawl.

Dear Sheriff:

Doc's got the bank money. I made Wall Eye's bartender take it out of the safe at the Last Chance. After I took that run out on you at the jail, I take a *pasear* down to the stockyards with a lantern. I pick up that lookout's trail. It doubles back through the alley to the Last Chance. And I danged near beat Blackie Rogers there. Blackie is a gent I run up against once down in Texas under the monicker of Black Jumbo. He remembered me. He thought I was still trailin' him an' squawked his head off on this robbery to set in with me. That gang of his ain't Diamond B's. They're wet blanket men brought in here by the Diamond B's to work over a bunch of Rafter R's an' ship 'em. I come to Ucross a-purpose to drop Blackie Rogers, although I didn't know it at the time. But I did it and now I'm goin' to round up the Rafter R guns and smoke 'em up. After that I'll come in and surrender. I believe I'd like deputy sheriffin'.

Spike MaGlone.

"Well, I'll be a dirty kyoodle." Hardy caught himself. "I was scared folks in Ucross would raise hell about me lettin' that Rafter R go. But I guess they can't say nothin' now. I'm danged glad he is hankerin' to do a little deputyin'."

IF MEN WORE PRICE TAGS

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

WELL, your boss thinks of you in terms of so much a week! You are worth this or that to him. How much you are worth depends upon—YOU! You decide the amount chiefly by your ability—by your training. Why not increase the amount by increasing your training? Thousands of men have done it by spare-time study of I. C. S. Courses. You are invited to earn more money. Mail this coupon.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 5992, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect	☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting	☐ Bridge Engineer
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Boilermaker	☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation	☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Building Estimating	☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Air Conditioning	☐ Chemistry
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio	☐ Steam Engineer	☐ Pharmacy
☐ Structural Draftsman	☐ Mechanical Engineering	☐ Steam Electric Engineer	☐ Coal Mining
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Mine Foreman ☐ Fire Bosses
☐ Management of Inventions	☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker	☐ R. R. Locomotives	☐ Navigation
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Patternmaker	☐ R. R. Section Foreman	☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Diesel Engines	☐ Air Brakes ☐ R. R. Signalmen	☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas	☐ Aviation Engines	☐ Highway Engineering	☐ Agriculture
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints	☐ Automobile Mechanic	☐ Civil Engineering	☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Heat Treatment of Metals	☐ Refrigeration	☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Poultry Farming

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Service Station Salesmanship	☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Secretarial Work	☐ First Year College Subjects	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Spanish	☐ Business Correspondence	☐ College Preparatory
☐ Accountancy	☐ French	☐ Stenography and Typing	☐ Illustrating
☐ Cost Accountant	☐ Salesmanship	☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier	☐ Cartooning
☐ C. P. Accountant	☐ Advertising	☐ Railway Mail Clerk	☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs

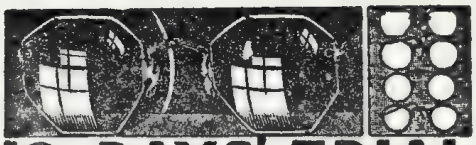
DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

☐ Home Dressmaking	☐ Advanced Dressmaking	☐ Millinery	☐ Foods and Cookery
☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing		☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering	

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada



10-DAYS' TRIAL

SEND ONLY 20 CENTS with name, age and address, and by return mail **RECEIVE** a set of **14 TRIAL GLASSES** to select from to fit your eyes **NOTHING MORE TO PAY** until you can see perfectly far and near. Then the above **Beautiful Style** will cost you only $3.90, no more; other styles $2.20 and up.

We only handle **High Grade** Single Vision and **DOUBLE VISION** or **KRYPTOK BIFOCAL** toric lenses, ground into **ONE SOLID PIECE of GLASS. DOCTOR H. E. BAKER,** O.D., with over 30 years' experience, **GUARANTEES** to give you **Perfect Fit** or **NO COST.** Circular with latest styles and lowest prices **FREE.**

MODERN SPECTACLE CO., Dept. 91-AR
3125 Pensacola Ave. Chicago, Ill.

SURPRISE

All your friends & relations by sending them your

PHOTOSTAMPS

of your picture, with your INITIALS or NAME containing up to 7 letters put on each stamp FREE!

100 Photostamps for $1.00
50 Photostamps for .75
25 Photostamps for .50

We do NOT need the Negative. Your Photo will be returned to you.

USE PHOTOSTAMPS ON

Stationery	Personal Cards
Business Cards	Invitations
Greeting Cards	Legal Papers
Photo Albums	Gift Cards
Business Advertising	Identifications

Announcements for all ocasions

ORDER NOW

Mail Stamps, Coins, or Money Order to

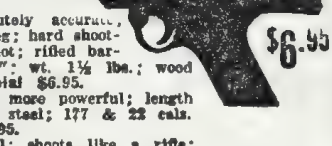
HOMOPIX PHOTOSTAMP CO.

1395 Broadway, Dept. DAA New York City

BE AN EXPERT SHOT!

NO PERMIT REQUIRED

HI-POWER AIR PISTOLS



Model 26 Haenel: Absolutely accurate, perfect balance; easy loading; hard shooting. Blued steel; single shot; rifled barrel; .177 cal. length 10½"; wt. 1½ lbs.; wood stocks. (List $9.90). Special $6.95.
Model 28 Haenel: Larger, more powerful; length 10½"; wt. 2½ lbs. blued steel; 177 & 22 cals. (Reg. $13.50. Special $8.95.
Diana No. 5: Long barrel; shoots like a rifle; single shot; 177 & 22 cals.; wt. 34 oz.; length 13½" (Reg. $13.50) Special $10.95
Crosman Air Rifles: 22 cal.—Single shot—$8.95; Repeater, $10.95.
Haenel 100 Shot Repeater; 500 steel BB's free (Reg. $5); $4.45.
500 Extra Pellets 177-60c; 22-75c; Steel BB's-35c; Darts 25c doz.
Bargain Catalog; Police Goods, Badges, Air Rifles Telescopes, Binoculars, Microscopes, Blank Pistols, etc, Send 3c stamp

LEE SALES CO., (Dept. Sx), 35 West 32nd St., N. Y. City

Made to order by PIT-RITE improved method BY MAIL, all over world. Finest Quality. MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE YOU WILL BE SATISFIED. We take your word. Catalog and impression material FREE. Write NOW!

UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY

Dept. 12A40 1555 Milwaukee Avenue Chicago, Ill.

"I Won $100 The Day I Got My Rabbit's Foot"

writes F. T. of Pa. "The PRAYER you sent me with my RABBIT'S FOOT has helped me wonderfully. I was nearly crippled. Now I am getting well again," says Mrs. L. C. of Ohio. "I now have steady work," writes Fred C. of Canada.

Letters like these coming from grateful men and women all over the country make me very happy. It may be coincidence, or it may be the psychological effect, but whatever it is these people believe I have helped them—and I would like to help YOU, too!

No matter what your Hard Luck is, Poor Health, No Job, Unlucky in Numbers, Games, Races, Sweepstakes, etc., in Love, Lonely, Worried, or anything else—you should send this very day for one of my Genuine LUCKY RABBIT'S FEET and the SPECIAL PRAYER for You and Your Loved Ones which I enclose in every order.

Thousands of people swear that the mysterious LUCKY POWER of a real RABBIT'S FOOT brings Good Fortune and Protection from Harm. Almost every living soul on earth has FAITH in the Tremendous, Mighty, Never-Failing POWER OF PRAYER. If you haven't tried the combination of these two Great POWERS, don't delay! People say they may easily Change Your Luck overnight!

So please hurry! Clip this message and mail with 25c (coin) to help cover my expenses. I want to help you as fast as I can. Your Sincere Friend, LADY HOPE, 122 Post Road, Noroton, Conn.

Copyright 1938, Lady Hope.

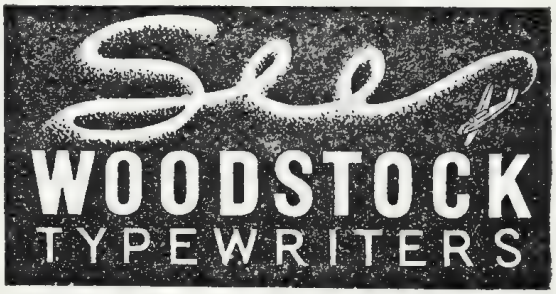
A HABERDASHERY STORE IN YOUR POCKET

Earn steady income supplying almost everything to wear for men! Shirts, hosiery, underwear, pajamas, work shirts, outdoor shirts and jackets! Everything guaranteed ONE YEAR. Experience unnecessary. Simply display self-selling free outfit and write orders. We deliver and collect. Write today for your outfit!

ROSECLIFF-QUAKER CORP.
DEPT. 131 1239 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

FREE MONEY MAKING OUTFIT

A DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE



Learn to MOUNT BIRDS

Tan SKINS, make up FURS

Be a Taxidermist. Double your hunting fun. We teach you at Home. Mount Birds, Animals, Pets, common specimens. Save your hunting trophies; decorate home and den. Make genuine KROMEX LEATHER, tan and make up furs for spare-time profit. 48 pages — tells all about it. FREE BOOK Hunters, get your copy. It's FREE BOOK New Free. Send post card. State your AGE.

NORTHWESTERN SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY
1751 Elwood Bldg. Omaha, Nebraska

INVENTORS

Time counts in applying for patents. Don't risk delay in patenting your invention. Send sketch or model for instructions or write for new 48 page Free booklet "Patent Guide for the Inventor." No charge for preliminary information. Prompt, careful, efficient service. Clarence A. O'Brien and Hyman Berman, Registered Patent Attorneys, 708-A Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

WANTED ORIGINAL POEMS SONGS

For Immediate Consideration
Send Poems to
Columbian Music Publishers, Ltd.
Dept. M33. Toronto, Can.

PROSTATE SUFFERERS

Prostrate gland acute or chronic, rheumatism, kidney and bladder sufferers send for FREE Sample. Amazing results.
PROSTEX CO., Dept. 85, MIAMI, OKLA.

SONG POEMS

WANTED AT ONCE! Mother, Home, Love, Patriotic, Sacred, Comic or any subject. Don't delay—send best poem today for immediate consideration.
RICHARD BROS., 147 Woods Bldg., CHICAGO, ILL.

BEWITCH OTHERS

Make them love you. Wield powerful love control. Secure clever woman's private methods (confidential). Get secret charm. Revealing book, introducing you to new power, only 10c (sealed). GARDEN STUDIOS, Dept. 7350, Box 423, Madison Square Station, New York.

EPILEPSY--EPILEPTICS!

Detroit lady finds relief for husband after specialists home and abroad failed. All letters answered. MRS. GEO. DEMPSTER, Apt. 4, 6900 Lafayette Blvd., West Detroit, Mich.

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Not a substitute, not habit forming. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and dependable, easy way to relieve the craving many men have.

FREE BOOK

Newell Pharmacal Co.
Dept. 67 St. Louis, Mo.

Does Your Hair Reflect Health and Beauty?

Use KOTALKO
To Help Hair Growth

GLAMOROUS

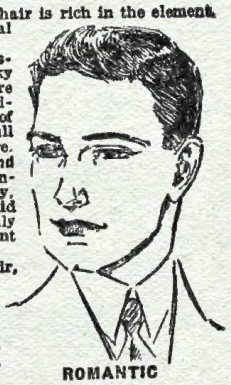
Is your hair soft, lustrous, beautiful?
Or is it thin, stringy, faded?
Does it enhance your appearance—or spoil your looks?

You are lucky if your hair is rich in the elements that make for normal growth.

But if it falls out excessively; if you have flaky dandruff, or if there are signs of approaching baldness, send for a sample of KOTALKO, or buy a full supply at the drug store.

Thousands recommend KOTALKO, the distinguished hair proprietary, because it is a valuable aid to scalp energy which remains the only source of hair growth and the sole resistant against preventable baldness.

Do not let scalp fatigue dull your hair, dim your poularity, or interfere with your charm. Safeguard your hair! Kotalko is sold at drug stores everywhere.



ROMANTIC

FREE BOX To prove the efficacy of Kotalko for men's, women's and children's hair. Use coupon.

KOTALKO CO., A-69, General P. O., New York

Name.....

Full Address.....

.....

UNLUCKY? UNHAPPY?

In games of chance, love, money or business? Thousands believe that the mysterious power of genuine five lodestones can bring good fortune and protection from harm. Allegedly carried by the occults as a so called

POWERFUL LUCKY CHARM

one alleged to attract good luck, love, money happiness, and the other to prevent bad luck, evil, and distress. Now you too can get a pair of these amazing curios. Draw, compel, attract. EVERY PAIR GUARANTEED live. Sold as extra highly magnetic genuine lodestones on money-back guarantee. Complete with carrying case and important information, only $1.97 pair. We pay postage if money is sent with order, or order C. O. D. Rush! ARABIAN CO., 2 Albany St., Dept. 1-DA, New York, N. Y.

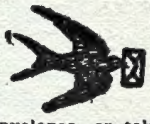
WHAT CAUSES EPILEPSY? IS THERE A CURE?

A booklet containing the opinions of famous doctors on this interesting subject will be sent FREE, while they last, to any reader writing to the Educational Division, 551 Fifth Ave., Dept. DB-1, New York, N. Y.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR MEN AND WOMEN WHOSE

GLANDS NEED THIS HELP

Here is a money back trial offer that men and women suffering from weak glands won't want to miss. A scientific formula, designed to stimulate all the glands in their normal, vigorous, health-giving functions, called GRAND MOGUL PELLETS, is offered on a test at our risk basis. Send $1.00 (3 boxes $2.00) for a 2 weeks' supply. Follow directions for 7 days. If you are not satisfied with results return remaining pellets for your money back. You are the sole judge, so act today. Write PROOVEN REMEDIES CO., Dept. DA-3, Irving Park Station, Chicago, Ill.



CONTACTS!!

Let us introduce you through our PERSONAL SERVICE. Individual attention to each member. Write today for information sent in plain sealed envelopes, or telephone

AMERICAN SERVICE
Grace Bowes, Director
3140-H Godwin Terrace, New York City
Telephone Kingsbridge 6-2921

SMOKERS NOVELTIES

6 Illustrated Cartoon Booklets (Vest Pocket Size) 20 Postcard Size Pictures of Artful Photographs of the finest quality. Also, 5 Pocket Novelties. Shipment is made same day order is received.

Special, All for $1.00

Send Cash, Stamps or Money Order

MONTMARTRE CO. (Dept. RW)
6 West 28th St. New York City

CARTOON BOOKLETS!! SPECIAL OFFER!!

(Sideline Salesmen and Agents) Fast selling line of Cartoon Booklets, vest pocket series, 10 different samples for 40c; 30 assorted for $1 or 100 for $2 mailed prepaid. Wholesale price list sent with order only. Send cash or stamps. No money orders.
REPSAC SALES CO., 6 W. 15th St. (Dept. DG-22), N. Y. C.

"COMIC CARTOONS"

4 new "Vest-Pocket Booklets" including an illustrated laugh book containing over 200 pages of mirth riots. All for $1.10 cash, stamps or money order. Foreign orders accepted. Delivery guaranteed.
LAF-HOUS, Dept. D.A., Box C Jackson Heights, N. Y.

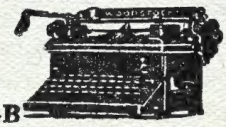
'MANHOOD' SLIPPING?

What! No pep? Look out, or the girls 'll be calling you 'Old Man.' Pretty soon you'll have to take a rocking chair with the old women! Yet anyone who can't enjoy life should try a doctor's double strength Prescription No. 1000—concentrated power pills—to restore body vigor, stimulate all the glands to healthy activity. No dope. For men and women. In one week, fc l like carin' to go! Results pure delight you or money back. SEND NO MONEY. Deposit $1 plus postage on arrival. Plain wrapper.

CHEMISTS SALES CO.
Dept. 2-DA, 4938 Irving Park Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

A DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE

See WOODSTOCK REBUILT BY BUILDER



Winner... Most World's School Contests—
EASY TERMS—FREE TRIAL
WRITE FOR LITERATURE DEPT. 28-B
WOODSTOCK TYPEWRITER CO., WOODSTOCK, ILL.

LONESOME?

Let me arrange a romantic correspondence for you. Find yourself a sweetheart thru America's foremost select social correspondence club. A friendship letter society for lonely ladies and gentlemen. Members everywhere; CONFIDENTIAL introductions by letter; efficient, dignified and continuous service. I have made thousands of lonely people happy—why not you? Write for FREE sealed particulars.
EVAN MOORE P. O. BOX 988 JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

LONELY?

Let nationally known organization supply desirable friends or select helpmate for you. Confidential. Give age for full particulars.

REV. JONES
P. O. Box 2459, Kansas City, Mo.

LONELY HEARTS

Find your happiness through an old reliable social extension club. 39 years of dependable service. Meet nice people. A multitude of members throughout U. S., Canada, some in foreign countries, seeking congenial mates. Many inform us they have means, one may be your ideal. Particulars free. Let us help you arrange a romantic correspondence.
STANDARD CLUB BOX C-9 GRAYSLAKE, ILL.

GET ACQUAINTED CLUB

Want a wife, husband, or sweetheart?

Members in most cities, coast to coast. Many financially independent, lonely, desire correspondents. Our clientele includes College bred and Professional types. Write, today, for confidential sealed particulars.
R. E. Simpson, Box 1251, Denver, Colo.

ARE YOU LONELY?

Meet someone near you. Special state lists. Many wealthy. Confidential, dignified service. Results or money refunded. Many have found happiness through my club—Why not you? Free sealed, information. Get Together Club, 2194-G Bathgate Ave., New York, N. Y.

LONELY?

Write this reliable club established 18 years. Feel the thrill of Romance. Members everywhere, many well-to-do. Confidential; interesting descriptions and Free particulars, sealed.
MRS. BUDD, Box 753-A, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

CARTOON BOOKLETS & GENUINE PHOTOS

SPECIAL—8 Cartoon Booklets, illustrated, handy (vest pocket size), also 72 all different unusual pictures, all poses. A real smile on every page and you get 8 booklets in all. Immediate Shipment. Sent Sealed.

SPECIAL: ALL FOR **$1.00**

NATIONAL COMPANY, Dept. C. M.
P. O. Box 3, Morris Hgts. Station, New York City

MANY WOMEN TESTIFY TO ITS

RELIEF FOR DELAY

WHY DON'T YOU DO WHAT SO MANY OTHER WOMEN DO?

THOUSANDS of women are needlessly miserable and unhappy because of abnormally delayed periods. If *you* are one of these troubled, discouraged women, lose no time in trying TRIPLE-X RELIEF COMPOUND. Scores of women in every part of the country, in large cities and small towns, *highly praise* TRIPLE-X RELIEF COMPOUND for its reputed effectiveness and the blessed relief it has given them.

Time-Tested

TRIPLE-X RELIEF COMPOUND is a time-tested preparation which can be taken at home without anyone knowing and in most cases with little, if any, discomfort; and most often without interfering with daily activities. Thousands of modern-minded women have used TRIPLE-X RELIEF COMPOUND; a large number of them having heard about it through friends who have been helped and are therefore grateful. Many who said their periods were long-overdue, severely obstinate, abnormally suppressed or painfully scanty claim TRIPLE-X RELIEF COMPOUND among the most pleasant and the most satisfactory aids they ever used. Many satisfied users vow they would never be without it again. Some keep it always on hand and take it just before they are due, so as to help bring on a full, unsuppressed period, free from abnormal delay.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION ON FIRST ORDER

Pure Vegetable Ingredients

TRIPLE-X RELIEF COMPOUND contains no harsh, habit-forming drugs, but is made almost solely of pure vegetable ingredients such as used by many doctors in their practice. So why be satisfied with anything less? Take TRIPLE-X RELIEF COMPOUND that thousands have taken and which scores of satisfied women enthusiastically praise.

Reliable Perio Compound

RELIABLE PERIO COMPOUND has proved especially effective in many cases of severely stubborn, abnormal delay. Numerous customers write and tell how pleased they are and that they feel it is worth many times more than the price we ask. We make no purport of its effectiveness in every case of severe, extra-late abnormal delay; we offer RELIABLE PERIO COMPOUND as the finest compound of its kind we have ever handled.

Be Sure You Get the Genuine, Guaranteed

ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES. Send your order direct to us and get the genuine TRIPLE-X RELIEF OR RELIABLE PERIO COMPOUNDS.

Read What Grateful Women Say About Triple-X Relief and Reliable Perio Compounds

"Please send Triple-X Relief Compound. Used one box before, after I had missed three months, and was more than pleased. Can't praise it enough." Mrs. S. B. H., Brinson, Ga.

"I am enclosing $1.00 for your Triple X. This is third box I have sent for, and I think they are wonderful." Mrs. C. M., Newcomerstown, Ohio.

"I have used your compound for the last four years, and the results are so satisfying, that I wouldn't be without them. A loyal user." Mrs. F. W., Flint, Mich.

"I think Perio Compound is wonderful. I tried it once and it worked fine, so I am ordering another box." Mrs. S. T. T., Rocky Mount, N. Car.

Money-Back Guarantee

TRIPLE-X RELIEF COMPOUND OR RELIABLE PERIO COMPOUND must give absolute satisfaction with the first order, or your money will be promptly refunded.

Send No Money

Just pay the postman when your order is delivered (plus 15c C.O.D. charge). However, if you are in a special hurry or wish to save the 15c C.O.D. charge, send your money with your order. Only $1.00 for FULL TREATMENT of TRIPLE-X RELIEF COMPOUND (NOT A SAMPLE OR TRIAL SIZE); $2.50 for 3 boxes. RELIABLE PERIO PILLS $2.00, 2 boxes $3.50. No letter is needed. Simply fill out and mail the coupon. Absolute privacy assured; all orders rushed in plain, sealed wrapper same day received. Also VALUABLE INFORMATION which every woman should know and FREE Catalog of Hygienic Necessities included. ***Avoid delay! Send your order today and be sure!***

POSITIVE PRODUCTS COMPANY

6609 Cottage Grove Avenue • Dept. 27-A • Chicago, Ill.

POSITIVE PRODUCTS CO.
6609 Cottage Grove Ave., Dept. 27-A Chicago, Ill.
Please rush the items checked below, in plain wrapper.

☐ I enclose money. ☐ I will pay postman plus 15c C.O.D. fee

☐ 1 Box TRIPLE-X COMPOUND..... $1.00
☐ 3 Boxes TRIPLE-X COMPOUND..... 2.50
☐ 1 Box RELIABLE PERIO COMPOUND (for very stubborn cases)..... 2.00
☐ 2 Boxes RELIABLE PERIO COMPOUND.. 3.50

Name.....

Address.....

City..... *State*.....

The Forbidden Secrets of Sex are Daringly Revealed!

AWAY with false modesty! At last a famous doctor has told *all* the secrets of sex in frank, daring language. No prudish beating about the bush, no veiled hints, but TRUTH, blazing through 576 pages of straightforward facts.

Love is the most *magnificent ecstasy* in the world . . . know how to hold your loved one, don't glean half-truths from unreliable sources. Now you can know how to end ignorance . . . fear . . . and self denial!

Everything pertaining to sex is discussed in daring language. All the things you have wanted to know about your sex life, information about which other books only vaguely hint, is yours at last.

MORE THAN 100 VIVID PICTURES

The 106 illustrations leave *little* to the imagination . . . know how to overcome physical mismating . . . know what to do on your wedding night to avoid the torturing results of ignorance.

Some will be offended by the amazing frankness of this book and its vivid illustrations, but the world has no longer any use for prudery and false modesty.

Don't be a *slave* to ignorance and fear. Enjoy the rapturous delights of the perfect *love life!*

Lost love . . . scandal . . . divorce . . . can often be prevented by knowledge. Only the ignorant pay the *awful penalties* of wrong sex practises. Read the facts, clearly, startlingly told . . . study these illustrations and grope in darkness no longer.

SEND NO MONEY!

To show you our faith in your satisfaction with this amazing book, we are offering it to you on trial. You send no money—just fill out the coupon below and then when it arrives, in plain wrapper, pay the postman $2.98 plus postage. Keep the book five days, then if you are not completely satisfied, send it back and we will refund your money immediately without question. "Eugenics and Sex Harmony" will not be sold to minors.

576 DARING PAGES

ATTRACT THE OPPOSITE SEX!

Know *how to enjoy* the thrilling experiences that are your birthright . . . know how to attract the opposite sex . . . how to hold love.

Are you an awkward novice in the art of love-making? Or, a master of its difficult technique? Knowledge is the basis of the perfect, satisfying love life. Ignorance leads to fear, worry, disease and shame. End ignorance *today*. You owe it to yourself—to the one you love—to read this book NOW!

A FAMOUS JUDGE SAYS THAT MOST DIVORCES ARE CAUSED BY SEX IGNORANCE!

■ When a man and woman who have been mutually attracted to each other and have enjoyed each other's company separate, there must be some tragic misunderstanding. In most cases that misunderstanding is due to sex ignorance.

IS SEX IGNORANCE DRIVING THE ONE YOU LOVE INTO THE ARMS OF ANOTHER?

■ Learn how to keep the love of your husband or wife at the high pitch of thrilling devotion. A satisfactory sex life will bind your loved one to you for all time.

STATE AGE WHEN ORDERING

OVER 100 GRAPHIC Illustrations

WHAT EVERY MAN SHOULD KNOW

The Sexual Embrace — *Can Virility Be Regained?*
Secrets of the Honeymoon — Sexual Starvation
Mistakes of Early Marriage — Glands and Sex Instinct
Venereal Diseases — The Truth About Abuse

WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW

Joys of Perfect Mating — How to Attract and Hold Men
What to Allow a Lover to Do — Sexual Slavery of Women
Intimate Feminine Hygiene — Essentials of Happy Marriage
Birth Control — The Sex Organs

There is no longer any need to pay the *awful price* for one moment of bliss. Read the scientific pathological facts told so bravely by Dr. Rubin. The chapters on venereal disease are alone worth the price of this book!

You want to know, and you *should* know *everything* about sex. Sex is no longer a sin, a mystery, it is your greatest power for happiness. You owe it to yourself, to the one you love, to tear aside the curtain of hypocrisy and learn the *naked truth!*

Pioneer Publications, Inc., 1270-6th Ave., Dept. 119 New York, N.Y.

Please send me, "Eugenics and Sex Harmony" in plain wrapper I will pay the postman $2.98 (plus postage) on delivery. If I am not completely satisfied, I can return the book and the entire purchase price will be refunded immediately. Also send me FREE OF CHARGE, your book on "New Birth Control Facts."

Name_____

Address_____

City and State_____ Age_____

Orders from Foreign Countries 15 Shillings in Advance

FREE! AMAZING NEW BOOK ON NATURAL METHOD OF BIRTH CONTROL

AWAY with artificial devices! Nature offers a dependable, healthful method of controlling conception as recently proven in startling scientific tests. The famous Ogino-Knaus theory of rhythmic birth control is explained in detail and includes a complete table of fertile periods. This book is FREE with orders for "Eugenics and Sex Harmony"

PIONEER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
Radio City, 1270 Sixth Ave., New York City